

The World Without Me

Chapter 1: Prologue-The Loser Dies and the Winner Loses All

A cold wind howled its sadness and despair at the scene below. A castle partly destroyed, abandoned, and hundreds of dead bodies littering the ground, sprawled in a mess with no more regards about whom they once served.

Blood was splattered everywhere, dark sky, dark moon mourning the loss of lives. Everything was deathly still; the wind had stopped, making the landscape look eerie and ominous. But nothing frightening was going to appear there; the war was over. It was over...for everyone. Nobody had really won, for the losses were too great.

A bird flew over the once green land, an unusual bird. A deep cry resonated throughout the air, a sad and desperate melody escaping its throat, trying to find at least one person alive.

On the ground, something suddenly moved. A body lying face down was pushed on the side to reveal an exhausted and completely drained dark haired boy with a peculiar lightning bolt shaped scar on his forehead.

Harry Potter looked around him lifelessly, panting and sagging. He let out a choked sob when he gazed at the body of the person who had been protecting him: Remus Lupin. The werewolf had taken the Avada Kedavra sent out by Tom Riddle that was meant for him, as Harry was using the very same curse on the Dark Lord and broke the Priori Incantatem at the same time. Except that none of Voldemort's followers had taken the chance of running in front of their master to protect him.

Voldemort was dead, as well as every other Death Eater, spy-Snape included.

In fact, the hardest part to see for Harry was to witness the death of his friends and to see their bodies sprawled on the earth. Dumbledore, McGonagall, Flitwick, even Hagrid; they were all gone. As well as

Ron and Hermione...hell, every student who had once attended Hogwarts. They had not been spared.

Harry just stayed seated on the ground, unblinking, arms loose at his sides while silent tears made their way down his cheeks. 'They're all gone. The Prophecy...it was right. One of us was supposed to stay alive...while all the others died.'

He let himself fall backwards and landed with a thud on the cold soil, staring emptily at the weeping sky: it was beginning to rain...and he didn't care.

"What'ss going on? What hass happened?"

Harry's dull green eyes widened slightly as he turned his head on the side to look at who had just talked. No sound of surprise came out of his mouth and he just blinked at Nagini, who was slithering on the blood-stained grass nearby.

Harry had no idea how the damn snake had survived but if it wanted to bite him and end his miserable life it was more than welcome to do so. But the bite never came. Nagini looked completely disoriented and clueless about what had transpired on the once magnificent castle's ground, and it stirred Harry's interest slightly.

"Why do you look sso confussed, Nagini? Why don't you kill me, like your masster sso wanted? Like you tried to do on sso many occassionss?" he hissed back to the Cobra to get its attention.

It worked; Nagini turned towards him even more and slithered until she was beside the tired boy. "You sspeak? Yet I do not know what you are talking about. All I remember iss a man looking at me and muttering ssomething I did not recognize, and then the resst iss all jusst a blur to me."

Harry almost scoffed in bewilderment. "I can't believe thiss iss possible," he muttered to himself, yet spoke in Parseltongue without realizing it. "I didn't think Imperiuss could work on a ssnake. I guesss you've been under Voldemort'ss control all thiss time."

The dangerous snake cocked her head on the side as if she was thinking about what Harry had said. However, she looked up as the dark haired boy suddenly sat up, a strange piece of wood resembling a stick clutched in his hand.

"I can't continue like this. I'm all alone..." he said desperately, and pointed the stick towards himself.

Nagini didn't understand a word he was saying as he reverted back to the human language but the snake wasn't stupid; it understood that the boy obviously wanted to do something irreparable to himself.

The snake hissed and shot out, coiling around the boy's arms to prevent him from doing something foolish. Harry gave a startled yelp but began to struggle around the living bound. "Let me go! I have no reasonsss to live anymore!"

Nagini showed him her fangs angrily. "Stupid snake-child! Do not throw your life away like this for nothing!"

Harry was starting to win against Nagini's hold; the creature didn't want to cut Harry's blood circulation and hurt him even more than he already was. But as the green eyed boy regained the grip on his wand, a shrill cry echoed right above his head and Fawkes landed in front of Nagini and him.

Of course, Tom's old servant hissed at the Phoenix but stopped as she realised that the fiery bird wasn't going to be a menace to her existence. Harry stopped struggling and stared at the Phoenix's cheerless eyes.

"So you're against me too, Fawkes? Look around you: everyone's dead! Even Dumbledore! What do you want me to do?!" Harry asked the Phoenix with a distressed and pained voice.

The Boy-Who-Lived-Again reeled back when he heard a deep melodious voice echo in his head.

"I could help you...Get back the things you lost and once held so dearly in your heart. Another chance at happiness, yet you would have to forge it by yourself, not an easy task."

Harry got over the realization that it was Fawkes talking to him. 'I guess this is how Dumbledore talked with Fawkes...' he thought silently, and then replied softly: "Enlighten me."

The fiery bird ruffled its wings slightly before continuing. "Many worlds exist, many parallel dimensions that I am aware of. I could send you there, but you would not be able to return here, ever. It would become your new home forever." It stopped to gauge Harry's reaction and seemed to nod when Harry grimaced.

Why would he want to come back here? He was the only survivor of Hogwarts, of this whole damned war.

Fawkes continued his explanation. "You do not exist in that world; you were killed as an infant. There is no Boy-Who-Lived, no hopes, and Voldemort still holds a position of power over the wizarding world, yet he comes out of his hiding place a little more often and shows a more daring and provoking side. You could restart your mission there and forge your own future because as you already know, you are the only one with the connection to Voldemort, and the only one who is capable of defeating him."

Harry nodded without a second thought, his face set in a determined expression and his eyes glowing in renewed anticipation and seriousness. This wouldn't be a field trip, he knew, and he would make damn sure that he would do his job correctly this time and protect this new world as he was destined to do.

After all, he had defeated Voldemort here, so he knew how the bastard liked to play already. He knew things that people in the other dimension probably didn't even suspect, and he was damn powerful for a seventeen years old, more powerful than any Hogwarts student should ever be.

"Just give me a second." Harry held his wand high and muttered "Accio!" under his breath.

Seconds later, his polished Firebolt, gift from his deceased Godfather, his old photo album, his invisibility cloak, a pouch of wizard money and his vault key floated to him from the half-destroyed Gryffindor tower and surprisingly enough, his faithful owl Hedwig followed Harry's belongings on her own free will. He took the precious objects and reduced their size so he could put them in his pockets and urged the snowy white owl to land on his outstretched arm.

"I guess I'm ready," he told Fawkes with a deep and commanding voice. As Harry took a step towards the now flying Phoenix, something nudged his heels.

"Are you going somewhere? Can I come with you? Not many people here speak my language and I do not want to be alone. It is strange, but I also feel as if I owed you my life. I like you, snake-child."

Harry stared at the pleading Cobra and slowly bent down, showing her his half-covered arm; his clothes were in tatters but he would remediate to this later.

Nagini hissed contentedly and settled around his waist. As she finally stopped moving, the snake was almost indiscernible with Harry's cloak color.

Fawkes flew over to Harry to let him pet his head one last time, and then it soared above the boy's head. The Phoenix's song came in resonance with Harry's wand and the seventeen years old Gryffindor started to glow a reddish color.

As Harry started to disappear, he heard Fawkes' last words of guidance. "Do not forget, Harry Potter: in this world nobody knows you and it will be hard to live without attracting too much attention to yourself. You can say whatever you want when you arrive, and can go to Hogwarts or not, it doesn't matter. But remember: some things WILL be different, as it is a parallel dimension. Good luck, may my other self find you if trouble should arise!"

Harry felt a great pull, even greater than a portkey, and being too tired and drained to resist after being the target of so many curses and Unforgivables he fell unconscious as Fawkes' last words echoed around him.

Seconds later, the grounds became deathly still again as the Phoenix burst into flames. It wasn't a flaming day, however, and from the ashes...nothing emerged.

End prologue.

[Review this Story/Chapter](#)

Chapter 2: The past editions of the Daily Oracle

A flash of red light illuminating the outskirts of Hogsmeade on this late Monday night should have alerted the citizens living there, but as it was in the dead of night nobody saw a thing and the road remained silent and deserted, except for the thick snow that covered the ground.

The first ones to wake up were Hedwig and Nagini. The poor owl ruffled her feathers and hooted her irritation at being almost thrown on the ground during their landing. Nagini slithered towards her new master, who was laying face-down in a messy heap of torn clothes, all the while complaining about the coldness of the atmosphere. "Man-child?"

No response.

Nagini nudged the dark haired boy with his tail but Harry was obviously too tired to respond. Hedwig flew down, landed beside Harry's face and pecked him repeatedly on the shoulder.

The Boy-Who-Lived twitched and moaned, and then sat up slowly, feeling himself shake like a leaf. "Hedwig? Nagini?"

Harry looked around with a confused expression and vaguely recognized the place as being the outskirts of Hogsmeade, even with all this snow; he could see the Shrieking Shack on the hill further on. He got up with a fair share of difficulty and let Hedwig settle on his shoulder once again.

"Masster Where are we? What sshould we do now?" Nagini asked while opting to hide under Harry's cloak to keep warm.

"We're at the outsskirtss of Hogssmeade. The firsst thingss we have to do iss find a place to ssleep for the night and then we'll gather ssome informationss on thiss world. Diagon Alley iss the besst place to begin with; there'ss a big library and I'm ssure they keep recordss of the Daily Prophet. I have a lot of catching up to do if I don't want to look like an ignorant."

Harry pointed his wand towards himself and muttered “Reparo!” His tattered clothes and cloak went back to their previous state; however, there was one last thing he had to do before going to the wizard village and he asked Hedwig and Nagini not to panic.

He didn’t know who he could trust in this world yet, and he was happy he had learned how to use glamour on his person in the beginning of his sixth year. Of course, it had been an “extra-curricular” class graciously tutored by Lupin, a secret well guarded by Harry, as well as his new animagus ability, also tutored by the werewolf.

It had been a necessity: he had been under too many threats and had had no choice but to go back to the nightly Occlumency sessions under Snape’s tutelage and to his Advanced Defense class with Remus Lupin, who had stayed hidden in one of Hogwarts’ many towers for the time being.

Harry was sure he could be an auror no problem, what with his Patronus charm, his Animagus ability, his Occlumency ability as well as the perfected Glamour spell he was able to cast. Throw in the fact that he had just killed ‘his’ Voldemort at 17 years of age and that made no doubt about his magical powers, wandless or not.

Harry closed his eyes and started to picture the way he wanted to look for the time being; he already knew how the glamour would look in the end, since he had used this appearance before as a test.

His hair lengthened and brushed past his shoulders but didn’t change color, his body grew up by a few inches and his face became sharper. He opened his eyes and deep blue orbs glanced down at the curious looking snake and up to the silent owl. Hedwig recognized this transformation so she ignored Harry, but it took Nagini a few minutes to get used to it.

As Harry started his trek towards Hogsmeade, his mind wandered over his glamour spell and the model he had used. It was easy to know: long dark hair and deep blue eyes, with a sharp appearance: Harry had used his deceased godfather’s image to create his own, even if he could not hide the lightning shaped scar on his forehead. He didn’t exactly look like Sirius, of course, that would’ve been too

hard to bear for him and Remus included, but he liked to know that there was some of his godfather in him.

Just a few windows were still lit but most of the shops were closed. Harry walked wearily

towards Rosmerta's pub The Three Broomsticks and knew by experience that it was always opened 'till very late at night. This world was no exception and it's with an air of confidence that he pushed the creaking wooden door open.

There were very few people up at this hour, and the ones present didn't take notice of him, having drunk too many Butterbeers. Rosmerta, on the other hand, spotted him immediately and slowly walked up to him. The woman was probably wondering who in Merlin's name was up at this hour and if he was friend or foe.

She greeted him with a smile nonetheless. "Hullo! What can I do for you?"

Harry gave her a tired smile back and took five Galleons from his pouch, handing them to her. "I would like to have a room here for a couple of days. I just came back from a rather tiring trip and I'm in serious need of rest."

Rosmerta looked surprised to see a kid with so much money but who was she to refuse? She nodded and motioned for him to follow her, side-stepping a drunken wizard who was going to fall off of his chair before long.

Harry petted Hedwig and gently asked her not to make a sound while he was silently thankful that Nagini had decided to stay hidden under his cloak. He didn't want to repeat his second year's incident, especially when Voldemort was still alive and kicking here. The consequences would probably be ten times worse.

"So... You look awfully young to be traveling by yourself."

Harry blinked out of his reverie when Rosmerta addressed him out of the blue. She probably wanted to gauge Harry's reaction and

answers to see if he was good or bad and she was careful in formulating her phrases. She spoke casually but the act didn't work with him. "Actually, you look like a Hogwarts student, with your cloak and all..." she trailed off.

Harry let a couple of silent chuckles escape his mouth and shook his head negatively, under the incredulous eyes of Rosmerta. "I'm sorry to say you're mistaking, Madam. Those black cloaks are rather popular and anyway, you don't see a school crest on it anywhere, do you?" he answered back friendly.

Rosmerta gave him a look-over and, after a short moment of deliberation, she nodded to herself and smiled back at him, deciding that the young man was rather nice and no threat at all. "I'm sorry for all the questions. Here's your room and key, call for me if you need anything. Now you should go to sleep, you look rather disheveled. Are you sure you'll be okay?" she asked out of concern.

Harry only shook his head and told her not too worry about him, but that it was still considerate of her to worry like that over his condition. Rosmerta eyed him hesitantly but as she yawned she forgot about it; her bed sounded like the best option at the moment. "If you're sure... I'll be going now, good night!" And with that she walked away and down the stairs to shoo the late customers away.

Harry closed his door and locked it with both the key and an array of locking spells, also including in the mix a couple of silencing charms: he didn't want anyone to hear Hedwig's hooting or worse, him talking in Parseltongue...or even worse: him awakening screaming bloody murder because of his still occasional nightmares.

"Good night Hedwig, good night Nagini."

His two familiars fell asleep without further ado while Harry 'Scourgified' himself. He was too tired to wash himself the long way and he didn't feel like going to sleep all dirty from the day's early events.

He slipped under the bed sheets and fell asleep instantly with the glamour still on, wondering what tomorrow would bring to his companions and him.

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Harry woke up very late next morning and vaguely wondered why it was so quiet and peaceful in the tavern; then he remembered he had cast a silencing spell around his room last night and with a sigh he fell back into bed and used this quietness to his advantage.

Here, nobody knew him and he was left in peace, which pleased the boy to no end. He could also do magic without being bothered; in this world he was dead and quite unregistered in the ministry books. Harry glanced at Hedwig and the white owl was still sleeping on a desk in the back of the bedroom.

Nagini, on the contrary, had searched for a source of heat and was now coiled around herself tightly at Harry's feet on the warm bedspread.

His mind wandered to his deceased friends and he fought the lump forming in his throat. Ron, Hermione, Lupin...everyone was dead. They were surely alive here, they had to be, but were they the same or were they different? What had happened here? What, in this world, was so different from his???

Harry closed his eyes tightly and let out a frustrated sigh as he found himself unable to get some more sleep. He just had too many unanswered questions and hypothesizes roaming in his mind and the problem was: he didn't feel like blocking his mind with Occlumency. He WANTED to know the answers.

Since sleep wasn't to come by anytime soon, he got up and put on his clothes and cloak, silently noting that he would have to buy some new clothes in Diagon Alley.

With one last look at his two sleeping familiars, he exited his bedroom and walked down the stairs.

“Hullo again! I was beginning to wonder when you were going to come out of your room!”

Harry jumped when Rosmerta suddenly appeared behind him with a beaming smile, making the other customers in the room look at him as if he was part of an exhibition. It made Harry uncomfortable but the owner of The Three Broomsticks merely told him to ignore them. As she said that, the attention on Harry started to recede and soon the atmosphere was back to normal again.

“Are you hungry? I could make you some breakfast, mister...” she stopped and looked at the blue eyed boy inquisitively. “Actually, I never caught your name.”

Harry seemed startled for a moment but he quickly covered his surprise with a smile. “That’s because I never mentioned it. How ill-mannered of me. My name is James, James Evans.”

Rosmerta put a digit on her chin and looked contemplative for a moment. “Hmmm, that’s not a common wizard name. But it’s a very beautiful name nonetheless!” She gave the long, black haired boy a questioning gaze as a very sad smile played on his lips.

“It is, isn’t it?” He ignored Rosmerta’s inquiry look and prepared to leave the tavern.

“Oh! I left my owl in my room and she’s very tired, so could you not go in there, please? Poor thing got enough action yesterday to last the rest of the week.” He left out the fact that there was also a very susceptible Cobra sleeping in his bed and then left The Three Broomsticks when Rosmerta nodded her assent.

“He’s a strange one, that he is,” an old wizard grunted out after the boy disappeared from the doorway.

Rosmerta nodded with a neutral face. “Yes he is. He came in really late last night, looking all disheveled and tired, asking for a room. I thought he was a student but he said he didn’t go to Hogwarts. Yet, he doesn’t look older than sixteen or seventeen.”

The wizard who had listened to her and the boy's brief conversation looked at the door where the young man previously stood by warily. "Maybe he's a trouble student and he ran away from school? Or worse...one of 'His' followers..." he whispered to Rosmerta under his breath.

The pub owner froze in fear for a moment but swatted the wizard's shoulder angrily. "Don't say things like that! And don't you dare alert the aurors for nothing! If I find something suspicious on the boy THEN they'll know about it and interfere. For now he hasn't done anything wrong and I kind of like him already."

She went back to her other customers with a huff, leaving the seriously paranoid old wizard sulking in his Butterbeer alone.

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Once he was far away enough from Hogsmeade, Harry raised his wand hand and was relieved to find out that the Knight Bus also existed in this world.

Even with all of his abilities, Harry still didn't know how to Apparate and quite frankly, he didn't want to learn how to do it. He hated the feeling of it and didn't dare think about the landings; he was barely able to land on his feet correctly with the darn Floo Network so Apparating was out of the question.

The presently blue eyed boy gave two sickles to, surprisingly, Stan, who was responsible of the Knight Bus even in this dimension. As the huge bus disappeared from view, Harry tried to stay on his feet without being sick and mused about Stan. 'He's really made out for this job, isn't he?'

At least some things were still familiar, like Tom, the bartender of the Leaky Cauldron. Many sets of eyes followed Harry's movements suspiciously as he walked to the other side of the room and he hurriedly tapped the old red bricks with his wand to open the entry to Diagon Alley.

The streets were bustling with life and it made Harry relax when no one's attention got riveted on him. Instead of going straight to the library, Harry made a quick detour to Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions and purchased a good amount of shirts, pants and robes, along with a warmer cloak made of Dragonhide.

He opted for the wizard style and threw his old clothes away immediately; the Dark Lord was powerful in this world and wearing muggle clothing wasn't the best option for those who wanted to stay alive as long as possible.

As soon as he set foot outside the store, after a praise from Madam Malkin because of his good looks and choice of clothing, Harry was "attacked" by a very angry owl. "Ow! Hedwig?! Stop that!"

The white owl hooted angrily and nipped at his fingers one last time before landing on her master's shoulder. She still looked at him as if she was mad that he had gone out without her and Harry could almost hear her say "Where the hell have you been?! I've been looking all over for you!"

Harry gave her an apologetic glance and petted her head. "Sorry girl. I thought you would have liked to sleep late. Guess I was wrong."

He made his way towards the library and mentally shuddered at the thought of an angry Cobra waiting for him back at The Three Broomsticks. He marched in front of the pet store and made yet another detour to get a fat, juicy mouse for Nagini...and he bought one for Hedwig after the owl on his shoulder hooted her indignity. "Here Hedwig. Take your mouse and wait for me on the rooftop. I'll try not to take too long."

The owl took the squeaking mouse without hesitation and flew on the rooftop of the bookshop. Harry chuckled at her but soon regained his seriousness. There weren't a lot of people, thankfully, and Harry quickly spotted the Old section on the second floor.

Harry searched the shelves for the Daily Prophet but sighed frustratingly when he found nothing under this title. Then he eyed a

bunch of newspapers with the word 'Daily' on them, so he took one from the old, yellowed pile.

"The Daily Oracle? Weird, but okay. It must be the equivalent of the Daily Prophet in my world." Harry took the pile that started with the date of his parents' death and sat down nearby, putting the articles on a small wooden table.

DAILY ORACLE

Godric's Hollow ATTACKED!!!

Harry raked his nerves when he read the bold title of the first newspaper he picked up and started to read, mentally repeating himself that this dimension was not his. But learning that his parents had indeed been killed, along with his other baby self, was still hard to bear.

But a statement caught his attention, something said by one of the investigators: "...the one year old baby, one Harry James Potter, curiously wasn't killed by the Avada Kedavra like his parents. There were strangling marks on his little neck, we think were made by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named in person, as if it had been an act of pure anger and vengeance..."

Harry pondered on this; had Voldemort heard about the Prophecy? Did the Prophecy exist here in the first place? He couldn't just go in the Department of Mysteries and look for the vase that contained the Prophecy told by Sibyll Trelawney, so he was in the dark there. One thing was for sure though: he would avenge 'his death'.

On the other hand, he was relieved and overjoyed to know that Pettigrew had been caught the same night Godric's Hollow was destroyed, and that Sirius had never gone to Azkaban.

Harry skimmed each article carefully and read those that were of interest for him only. He came out two hours later, all shaken up, but twice as determined to put an end to the Dark Lord's reign of terror...again.

Hedwig flew back on his shoulder and nipped his ear with affection: the mouse had probably been greatly appreciated and Harry mentally hoped Nagini would like his.

He walked around Diagon Alley for a little while and when he went back in the Leaky Cauldron's direction, he spotted the Quidditch shop. It was a little late to go in so he only took a quick peak at the products shown in the shop window.

There was the usual broom polish and this year's new broomstick: the Nimbus 2004. 'No Firebolt? Hm...' Harry wondered over this fact briefly but didn't waste any time on this matter.

He quickly walked out of the Leaky Cauldron after being eyed suspiciously once again and called the Knight Bus, all the while hoping that Nagini wasn't going to bite him in his sleep or do it as soon as he opened the door to his bedroom.

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"Ahh! You're back! I was wondering where you were gone to! Oh? Your owl found you? She must've been pretty worried about you, then!" Rosmerta exclaimed as soon as Harry entered The Three Broomsticks.

The blue eyed boy gave her a smile and nodded, petting Hedwig's plumage in emphasis. "Yes, she's always been protective, but I like her a lot anyway."

Harry was about to get up the stairs when Rosmerta stopped him. "Hey, James! Aren't you going to eat?"

'James' nodded his affirmation. "Yeah, I'll be down in a minute. I have some things to unpack then I'll come back."

Since he looked in a hurry, the tavern owner let him be and went back to her job.

Harry almost ran up the stairs and unlocked his door, waving his wand discreetly to put up a silencing charm to cover the loud and

angry hissing that was surely going to happen as soon as he opened the door.

And he was right: Nagini was waiting for him on the floor, golden eyes looking up at him in ire. "It wass about time! How dare you go out without me when I pledged my allegiance to you! I do not know what iss holding me from biting you! I-"

Harry gulped and grabbed the mouse from its box, showing it to the enormous Cobra. That quickly shut Nagini up and the snake followed the mouse's movements with vehemence.

"Look, I know what I did wass wrong and to make mysself forgiven I bought you thiss little treat."

If Nagini had lips she would surely have licked them hungrily, but the Cobra seemed to snap out of it for a second and Harry could almost feel the snake's glare on him. "But that doessn't excusse what you did! I will follow you everywhere you go and protect you, whether you like it or not!"

Harry sighed and nodded with a small smile. "I don't mind at all, Nagini. I like your company. I jusst thought you would have liked to ssleep a little while longer, ass I thought Hedwig would alssso have liked. You can glide up my legss and resst at my wasste and armss. Now, I'm going back downsstairss to grab ssomething to eat before Rossmerta comess up and force-feed me."

Nagini continued to follow the movements of the squeaking mouse and seemed to hesitate for a moment. Harry chuckled and let go of it; the Cobra didn't waste a second and bit it to poison it.

Harry was fascinated by the way Nagini caught her pray and the wicked thought of the mouse being Pettigrew made him grin darkly. "Are you coming, Nagini?"

Harry held his arm for the snake to glide on but Nagini looked up at him with a mouth-full and round golden eyes. "Too busssy. Eating... Later. Yess, later I will follow you everywhere. Later."

Harry laughed out loud and shook his head while he locked his door once again, his purchases left on the bed to unpack later and Hedwig attached to his shoulder once again.

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I won't tell you what Harry's Animagus self is, if you were wondering! (blows a raspberry) You'll know later! (giggles)

REVIEW!!!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos

Chapter 3: Close encounter of the Hooch kind

It was now Friday, 4 days after his sudden appearance. The people in Hogsmeade were a little more at ease to see such a young boy walking around as if the little wizarding town was completely familiar to him even if the boy claimed that he did not come from here.

Every time they saw a snowy white owl fly around, they knew that the boy wasn't far behind. Harry, at first, didn't really know what to do here and what to do with his life. He couldn't just go to Hogwarts like that, in the middle of the school year.

Outside of Hogsmeade it was snowing, but the resident wizards of the town had opted to create a magical shield that would repel the snow. Unfortunately, it was still very cold outside so Harry always wore his new dragonhide cloak with a warm scarf, which, of course, wasn't the familiar red and gold one.

He had also found the perfect idea to occupy his time and be useful not too long ago. Rosmerta had had problems managing the pub with only two employees, who were only there to make the food, so Harry managed to make Rosmerta hire him to work at The Three Broomsticks. She soon found out that James was a devoted worker and it made her job way easier, to her great contentment.

James said hello to the regular customers who knew him as he got in the busy pub, coming back from a late errand. Rosmerta accepted the bag with a thankful, yet tired smile.

The Three Broomsticks was loaded with people tonight and she had too much to do to manage on her own. She gave a puppy dog eyes look at James and the dark haired boy smiled playfully and nodded, going upstairs to change clothes.

"I'm sorry James. I know I said it would be a day-off for you but I can't seem to be able to manage alone tonight. Since I received this new variety of Butterbeer the people can't seem to have enough of it," she explained when James came back with the correct clothing attire, while taking two clients' orders at the same time.

Nagini had opted to stay in the bedroom upstairs and knew that if Harry was in trouble, she wasn't far away to help the boy.

Harry nodded and set his face in business mode. "That's no problem for me. I didn't have anything to do tonight anyway. Might as well help you before you collapse."

Rosmerta snorted at him but let him deliver the orders to the customers, which he did efficiently.

"A new employee? He seems young, don't you think?"

Rosmerta jumped at the intruding voice and turned around to gaze at one of Hogwarts' teachers. "Xiomara! You startled me! Troubles with the little first years again, hey?"

The teacher grimaced and pouted, taking a rather big gulp of her Butterbeer. "That's another way of saying it, yeah."

She didn't elaborate on the subject, so Rosmerta let her be and walked towards Harry, who was transporting three plates at the same time and searching to whom these orders belonged to. "Hey James! Need help?" Rosmerta asked with laughter in her eyes.

James rolled his blue eyes but nodded nevertheless. Rosmerta pointed towards the right customers and the dark haired boy's gaze froze on the last client. Rosmerta waved a hand in front of him and looked at the teacher. "She has cool eyes, doesn't she?" Rosmerta said, referring to Xiomara's yellow hawk's eyes.

Harry came out of his reverie and blinked, answering with a slow "Yeah. Who is she? I've never seen her around before." He faked the curious look perfectly. Interiorly, his heart was beating wildly. It was only his first year flying instructor, but Merlin, it was good to finally see a familiar face from Hogwarts in Hogsmeade.

"Hm, you'll probably see more of her since you work here now. Her name's Xiomara Hooch and she's the flying instructor at Hogwarts. I

know it's the middle of the week but she only comes here when the first years give her hell during classes. It makes her unwind and forget about the little hellions. I'm sure she'll have a couple more Butterbeers before going back to the castle, she always does that."

Rosmerta sighed and shook her head. "You better deliver those meals before they get cold, James," she reminded him.

The boy startled and rushed to an impatient looking couple. "Sorry about the delay!"

He gave them an apologetic look and the witch just couldn't resist him. "It's okay!" She gushed while her husband rolled his eyes at her and started to eat. "My! You're such a nice looking young fellow! I hope you'll be here the next time we come!" she said joyously.

Harry quirked a smile and nodded. "Well, it will be a pleasure to serve you again. If you would excuse me, I have this last order to deliver. Just call for me if you need anything else."

He excused himself politely to the nice couple and his heart started to pound against his ribcage once again. 'Goddamn it, Harry! It's just Hooch! Get over it!' He mentally whacked himself and put the plate in front of the mumbling teacher, making her jump at the suddenness of the movement.

"Oh! Sorry! Just didn't see you there!" Xiomara reddened in embarrassment and brought the plate closer to herself.

Harry chuckled. "Tough day?"

Hooch gave him the wisp of a smile and started to eat her meal.

The dark haired boy desperately wanted to shake her frantically out of her bad mood and ask her about Hogwarts' inhabitants but it would look too suspicious. He knew some people in Hogsmeade still didn't trust him so he just turned around and delivered new orders for the next few hours, clearly intending on talking a little more with the flying instructor once the pub cleared out.

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It was around ten o'clock when the people started to go back home for a good night's sleep. Rosmerta dismissed James from work with a big grin; the business had been particularly good today.

The dark haired boy asked the cook to give him two Butterbeers and he trekked to a still brooding Xiomara Hooch who was sitting alone in a corner. The teacher startled when a mug of Butterbeer was placed in front of her, and even more so when Rosmerta's young helper sat down in front of her, sipping a drink himself.

Harry grinned and winked at her to ease the tension. "It's on the house, but for you it's the last one tonight. I think you were desperately in need of some company to cheer you up."

Hooch nodded gratefully and took a sip. "Thank you. I apologize for my rudeness earlier but I've been having some trouble with my classes at Hogwarts lately. By the way, my name's Xiomara Hooch."

Harry shook her hand above the table. "Pleasure. Rosmerta told me of your dilemma. My name's James Evans. So, what kind of troubles do you have?" he asked curiously. He didn't know if his Hooch had these little depressive episodes so he wanted to know what could possibly bug her like that.

The hawk eyed woman sighed loudly and took another gulp of her beverage. "Well, you probably know by now that I'm a teacher at Hogwarts; I'm the flying instructor and I teach the first years how to fly a broomstick correctly. I've always had some troubles in the previous years but the kids I'm teaching now don't know a thing about flying. Oh, some of them know, but not the way I want them to know. They don't know what I mean when I ask them to understand the beauty of flying." Hooch looked embarrassed. "I'm not making any sense, am I?"

Harry shook his head. "Oh no, I perfectly understand what you mean. I love flying myself, so you're not talking with an ignorant on the matter. I love the thrill of flying, of floating above the clouds and then swooping down in a dive and pulling the broom up at the last second

before I crash on the ground. Turn and twist with the wind and let myself fall into a free fall and then pulling up again in a rush, it's just like an exhilarating experience and once you try it you can't stop. You're free to go wherever you want, you forget your problems and you just –feel- the wind blowing your hair away...”

The more he talked, the more his daydreaming eyes closed and he swayed gently on his chair as if he was really on a broomstick, forgetting everything around him. He had such a thrilled and passionate expression etched on his face that it touched Xiomara to the core.

As the boy finished, she was left speechless for a moment and Harry finally opened his eyes, blushing under the teacher's enthralled gaze.

“I...I've never heard someone speak about flying in such a passionate way before...” she whispered.

“That's exactly what I feel like, except that I would never have been able to describe the feeling like you just did. I wish my students could understand that. The first years are either scared or want to show off, and they often land themselves in the infirmary because of their carelessness. The second year level and up to the seventh, they just want to play Quidditch the hard way and they often get too competitive; the Slytherin and Gryffindor houses the most. Those two houses will never get along, they were born to hate each other, I swear. The Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, tried for many years to reunite them but to no avail. The thing that doesn't help is the rivalry between two seventh year students of Gryffindor and Slytherin house: Ronald Weasley and Draco Malfoy. Since day one they've been at each other's throat because of their family' hatred.” Xiomara put a hand in front of her mouth. “I'm babbling, forgive me.”

Harry once again shook his head, but his hands, which were now hidden under the table, were trembling. ‘So, Ron is here. Thanks God. I don't much care about Malfoy but it looks as if everyone I knew back in my own dimension is here. As for that Gryffindor/Slytherin enmity...’

Harry almost had to restrain a dark smile from showing on his face. Voldemort, unknowingly, had not only transferred some of his power to him as an infant, but also some of his inheritance, making Harry the heir of both Gryffindor AND Slytherin. He wasn't a direct heir of Slytherin, of course, but in a sense Tom Riddle was like a second 'father' to him in some odd, twisted and oh so wrong sort of way.

"You're not babbling. I don't mind at all. Better let your emotions get out than stay in. And anyway, this castle kind of makes me curious. But that's not the point. What did you think of doing with your first years?"

Hooch shrugged. "I don't know yet. Say James, when was the last time you flew?"

James gave her a forlorn look and a sad smile. "It's been a while. Too long, actually, and I miss it greatly. I can't really fly in the village's area and it's snowing outside the magical barrier. I don't fly as much as I would like to anymore." He got the dreamy look again and Hooch smirked, her eyes showing a renewed spark.

"Say, maybe we could have a little match, a little one-on-one someday? I'm sure Albus, our Headmaster, wouldn't mind if I invited you at all. What do you know about Quidditch?" She asked with a crafty look directed at him.

Harry caught on quickly and smirked back with a mysterious glint in his blue eyes. "I know enough, that's all YOU need to know."

She leaned back in her chair, her sour mood now completely forgotten. "Ooh? Is that so? What position?"

"I was told that I would have made a good beater...but that I was probably born with a Golden Snitch in my hands, so that makes no doubt about what position I played."

Xiomara whistled. "A Seeker, eh? I wonder how good you are. Good Seekers who really know how to handle a broom are rare at Hogwarts. The best we have now is the seventh year Slytherin Draco

Malfoy, but he truly doesn't understand the beauty of flying. All he wants to do is crush the Gryffindor team since Oliver Wood, the best captain Gryffindor ever had in a long time, has graduated a couple of years ago. The current Gryffindor Seeker Ginny Weasley, younger sister of the team captain Ron Weasley, isn't faring well since Malfoy's father," she said with some kind of disgusted facial expression, "bought new Nimbus 2004 for the whole Slytherin team. ... I'm babbling again, must be the Butterbeer."

Harry chuckled at her but mentally sneered. 'Old Malfoy is still alive and kicking here, I see. Probably still in the ministry. Most of them must be corrupted since Voldemort is still alive. That's one hell of a problem I have here...'

He plastered on a smile when Hooch asked him if he wanted to play a one-on-one against her just for fun, of course.

Harry panicked internally. Was he ready to go back to Hogwarts now? Right after the final battle still freshly embedded in his mind?

'I think not.'

He wasn't able to completely erase his nervousness. He didn't want to make a fool of himself and crush someone in a hug when they knew nothing about him here. And since he wanted Tom's attention on himself instead of on Hogwarts, it was better to stay as far away as possible for the moment.

"I'm sorry but I can't. Not right now anyway. There are still plenty of things for me to do here and..."

Hooch gave him a disappointed look but nodded understandingly. "Oh. Okay then. But if you ever want to play just come to Hogwarts and ask for me, I'm sure that won't be a problem."

With all of that, it was getting pretty late. Hooch yawned loudly and Harry thought it as her cue to go back to the castle. "Do you want me to accompany you back? You look a little shaky to me."

The teacher shook her head negatively and looked perfectly conscious, if not a little tired, even if she had drank a good number of Butterbeers. “Naa, I’ll be fine,” she dismissed the subject with a wave of her hand, but Harry wasn’t about to let her go back to Hogwarts alone, especially at this hour, out in the dark and walking the path back to Hogwarts with the Forbidden Forest bordering the trail. If Voldemort was going to attack, as Harry heard he did numerous times, the Boy-Who-Lived-Again would be there to give him one hell of a fight!

“Rosmerta, I’ll be back soon. I’m just going to escort Madam Hooch back to Hogwarts.”

The pub owner nodded, as she cleaned a table. “How considerate of you, James! But do be careful on the way. The snow is very thick outside.”

Harry nodded and omitted to tell the second reason out loud: Voldemort’s followers were everywhere.

Xiomara put on her winter cloak and waited for James to come back downstairs with warmer clothes. He came back with a white owl perched on his shoulder and, unknowingly to the two women, a large Cobra hidden under the dragonhide cloak. “I’m ready, let’s go!”

The cold wind attacked them as soon as they stepped on the other side of the magical barrier. The snow was deep so Hooch cast a feather-light charm on both herself and the thankful boy.

The way back to the castle was silent, and sometimes Harry caught Hooch throw a sneaking glance in his way. He didn’t mind at first but it started to bother him after a good fifteen minutes.

Without even looking at her he asked; “Is there something on my face?” It was a polite way to tell her to stop doing that.

The teacher reddened even more –the cold temperature didn’t help- and she cast her gaze elsewhere. “Sorry about that. But as I kept looking at you I couldn’t help but think that you look a lot like one of the teachers at Hogwarts. I know it’s silly...”

Harry stumbled in the snow and barely caught himself before plunging face deep into the thick and freezing white blanket that covered the ground.

She threw him a questioning glance but he regained his footing and continued his trek as if nothing ever happened, so she dropped the subject.

“Oh? Curious indeed. But I don’t have any family so it’s impossible that I might be related to however you’re thinking about,” he said with disregard.

She gave him a pitying look but he ignored it; he hated it when people pitied him. His mind kept screaming ‘SIRIUS IS AT HOGWARTS!’ But there was very little he could do right now, remembering that he had to stay away for everyone’s safety. It was his plan to beat Voldemort –again- and then come out into the light.

The trail was nearing its end and Harry could now see Hogwarts, barely, for the falling snow and the darkness around them made it difficult to see. Hooch stopped and looked at him with a thankful smile. “I can walk the rest of the path on my own. It was really nice of you to accompany me up ‘till here, but now it’s you who’s far away from Hogsmeade.”

Harry gave her a reassuring smile and petted his owl. “I’ll be fine and I have some company anyway. You just take care of yourself on the rest of the way.”

She nodded. “Thanks James! You’re a very nice boy! I hope to see you again soon! And remember! You owe me a Quidditch match!”

He chuckled at her playfulness, waved and turned around. Hooch watched as he disappeared into the darkness and got back to the castle without any problems.

“Gone to Hogsmeade again, have you?”

The flying instructor gasped and jumped in surprise, her hand moving to rest on her chest. "Severus Snape! Don't do that ever again if you don't want Poppy to examine me because of a heart attack!"

She glared at the Slytherin Head of House and almost pouted as it had no effect on the Potions Master. "I swear, Severus, your stalking is going to land me into St-Mungo's one of these days," she muttered while taking off her snow covered cloak. She quickly cast a drying spell on it before it could wet the floor; she knew how Argus Filch could get when it was a matter of cleanness.

Snape looked around in boredom as she huffed at him. "Someday you're going to get yourself killed by going to Hogsmeade alone at night."

Xiomara looked startled and then gave him a teasing smile. "Why Severus, I never knew you cared!"

The Potions Master didn't take the bait at all, being known for his impassiveness, and he sneered at her. "Hardly. I was just referring to your behavior, which is intriguingly comparable to typical reckless Gryffindor behavior." With those last words, he walked away with a swish of his robes to stalk more important corridors leaving Hooch behind, rolling her eyes at HIS typical Slytherin behavior.

"Oh! I'll just make you know that I wasn't alone!" she said loudly but she didn't know if he heard her or cared as he rounded a corner and disappeared down another hall.

She shook her head with a desperate sigh and went back to her quarters to get some shut-eye.

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Harry knew by experience that nothing or no one was going to jump on him on his way back. His senses indicated that there wasn't any danger and his scar wasn't throbbing. He discovered, during an experience he had to make after he arrived here, that he was indeed connected with the Voldemort of this world. He had lifted the

permanent mental wall he had put on for just a minute and had to close the link once his head started to hurt badly.

Voldemort was very much alive here, that made no doubt, but he didn't have a clue that there was a Harry Potter –alive- somewhere capable of seeing through his eyes (which were still blue instead of the blood red color Harry was used to since Riddle was alive here).

Harry felt something move against his sides and Nagini poked her head out of his left sleeve; being a snake she didn't like the cold air but she was starting to feel alone down there while her master talked with Hedwig. "You almosst sstumbled on the ground a while ago, masster. Wass there ssomething wrong? I almosst came out of my hiding place at that time."

Harry looked down at Nagini and sighed softly. "Don't worry Nagini. I wass jusst sshocked by ssomething the teacher ssaid. I told you of Ssirius Black a while ago, and that I misssed him greatly when he died in my world. Well, apparently, he iss a teacher at Hogwartss."

The boy smiled sadly, not being able to say more. The cobra understood and stayed silent, wiggling back down the sleeve to wrap around Harry's waist again as a comforting gesture.

Rosmerta gave a big sigh of relief when James came back. "Finally! I was beginning to grow worried! I hope you intend to have a good night's sleep because it's a Hogsmeade weekend for the students of Hogwarts. The Three Broomsticks will be filled again tomorrow." She then went to bed, dead tired of the day and of the worry the boy gave her until he walked through the door.

Harry walked back to his bedroom and fell on his bed with a groan. "Damn! I didn't think about Hogsmeade weekends..."

Hedwig flew back to Harry's desk and Nagini coiled in a tight circle at the end of his bed.

Harry tossed and turned the entire night, unable to sleep peacefully. His nightmares of his parents dying, Sirius falling through the veil, Lupin running in front of him to protect him from the Avada Kedavra

and his friends dying kept haunting him and no matter how powerful his Occlumency ability was, he just couldn't sleep.

The Sleeping Draught he took was nowhere near strong enough to stop the nightmares and it's in moment like these that Harry thought about the Potions Master in a very good way. Luckily there was a strong Silencing charm around his room because he was surely going to have a sore throat and one hell of a headache the next day.

To be continued...

Next Chapter: Hogsmeade weekend. Harry doesn't feel well because of his nightmares, resulting in an angsty moment and going to St-Mungo's. Draco Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle and some other younger and easily scared students have a peek at the mysterious and dark looking new helper of Rosmerta.

You liked this chapter? Then REVIEW!!! Thank you!!!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos

p.s.: For those who were wondering, I'll try to update "Within the Chamber she Lies" as soon as I can. There's a lot of action to be written and I don't want to fuck the chapter up by writing it too fast. There are a good 9 pages done, though. It should be posted soon.

Chapter 4: No such thing as a shade of grey

Harry let out a silent groan and turned on his side, bringing the blankets up to cover his face from the blinding winter sun. He had a pounding headache (also called scar-ache) and his throat throbbed painfully.

How he longed to have a strong headache relieving potion and a numbing potion at his disposition, but when he put his hand on the night-table to get the bottles, a habit he had gained over the years, his hand found nothing but air and it didn't contribute in attenuating his already very sour mood.

Hedwig flew over to him and hooted worriedly while Nagini nudged the blankets aside with her tail. "You do not look sso well, young masster. Perhapss you sshould sstay in bed today," the snake hissed in concern.

Harry shook his head wearily and got up with a silent grunt and shaky legs, grimacing when he gazed at his reflection in the bathroom mirror. "Ugh!"

He coughed and grimaced again when the ache in his throat flared to life even more. "Just my luck..." he muttered, but it came out like a low and raspy whisper.

He tried to tame the long wild locks of hair of his glamoured self and scowled when they refused to cooperate, just like his real hair. When he pushed a strand of hair away from his face his scar was there, angry red, as if mocking him and making sure he remembered his duties to the whole damn world.

In a silent burst of sudden rage, he bunched his hand in a tight fist and punched the mirror without holding back...and mentally kicked himself afterwards when his blood coated the broken pieces of glass. At least he didn't have any shards embedded in his hand, that was a start, but it hurt like hell and there was blood all over the floor.

He scowled –it still didn't hurt as much as his head- and whispered "Scourgify". The broken shards and the red drops on the floor vanished.

Nagini slithered up to him when she heard the sound of glass being broken and asked herself what had happened to make her master act so viciously all of a sudden. Then, the Cobra spotted new drops of blood on the floor, courtesy of the still bleeding hand. "You hurt yourself. Do you need help?"

Harry gave Nagini an empty smile and shook his head negatively. He made himself a homemade bandage and got dressed, putting a heavy cloak on to hide the bandaged hand correctly without it being too obvious. He knew that Rosmerta would need him today more than any other day: it was a Hogsmeade week-end and, for the first time ever, Harry dreaded it.

Nagini coiled under his cloak and rested at her usual place around the boy's stomach. Hedwig flew to his shoulder and he walked out of his bedroom tiredly.

Rosmerta gasped and fussed over his present state as soon as she saw his exhausted and sick looking face. "James! You look as if you've been cursed into Hell and back again! And you're burning up with fever! I knew I never should have let you go out yesterday night!" She obviously felt guilty and angry with herself.

Harry shook his head back and forth, making her stop in mid-rant. "Nightmare," he croaked out softly, his throat incapable of producing any louder or longer phrase.

She looked really worried and somewhat curious that a nightmare could have caused him to be like this. "I've never heard of a nightmare strong enough to cause such damage to someone's throat before."

She looked puzzled, until Harry whispered "Silencing charms. Always."

That didn't help to ease her worries at all. "Why didn't you tell me?" She held his hand in hers and didn't notice him wince. However, she did feel a sticky substance slowly coating her hands and quickly let go of his hands as soon as she realized it was blood, his blood.

"JAMES! What in Merlin's name happened to your hand!"

He looked downcast and muttered "accident" dismissively.

Within a second, a decisive frown marred her face and she gripped his arm, pulling him towards the Floo chimney. She put a handful of Floo powder into his good hand and pointed a digit in the direction of the fire with a stern face. "You. St-Mungo's. Right now!" She left no place for argument and Harry visibly sighed, threw the powder and walked in the green fire.

"St-Mungo's," he whispered as eloquently as he could and felt the – hated- pull towards the new destination, Hedwig squawking indignantly as she flew away before the green fire could get her. It would have made a funny sight to see him stumble out of the fire gracelessly if only he hadn't looked so pale and sick.

A passing MediWizard spotted the boy and quickly walked up to him. "Are you alright young man? You don't look so good!"

Harry held himself from scoffing rudely and rolling his eyes. 'That's the understatement of the day.'

The only thing he whispered was a weak "sore throat, headache" while putting his hand on the designated parts.

The MediWizard frowned and put his hand on Harry's forehead, his eyes widening at the hotness of the boy's brow...and at the oddly shaped scar at the same occasion. He gave Harry a quill and a bunch of papers and made Harry sit before the boy fell unconscious or something. "Can you fill those papers? I'll be back in five minutes to look after you."

Harry opened his mouth to protest but the look the MediWizard gave him made Harry close his mouth and mope. He knew by experience that nothing could stop a doctor once they spotted a patient, experience he had gained by unsuccessfully trying to run away from Poppy Pomfrey's care.

“’ Kay,” he mumbled half-heartedly. At least he would get some quality headache-relieving potion out of the deal.

The MediWizard came back a few minutes later, motioning for Harry to follow him. They sat in his office and the doctor started to examine his hand. It didn't look very good; Harry's bandage was soaked in dried blood, and when the doctor unwrapped it started to bleed again.

“Those are nasty cuts you got there, young...” he gazed at the paper forms out the corner of his eyes. “Mr. Evans. What happened?”

Harry gave him a sheepish look as the older man pointed his wand at his hand and started to say a healing spell.

“Got mad. Punched mirror.” Harry motioned for his throat; he wasn't really able to talk more than a few words at a time.

The doctor raised his eyebrows while he got some sort of ointment. He turned again in mid-step and retrieved a labeled vial containing a blue potion from his shelves. He first put the ointment on the younger boy's abused hand and wrapped it neatly with a new bandage.

“There, this should do it for the hand. It'll be as good as new tonight. You must have been pretty angry to punch a mirror and do this kind of damage!” he joked. “What were you angry about anyway?” The doctor chuckled lightly.

Harry looked away and shrugged. “Don't remember.”

He just couldn't say he had had a nightmare because of his damn scar and screamed his throat raw, only to punch the mirror because he didn't really had, and still doesn't have, a wonderful life!

The MediWizard felt as if the boy was hiding something but it wasn't his business to pry in, so he dropped the uncomfortable subject. "Now for your throat! Open your mouth!"

Harry obeyed, albeit reluctantly. He kept looking sideways nervously; he wasn't used to have someone so near him, face to face, and having said someone eyeing the inside of his mouth felt even more unpleasant.

"By Merlin, what did you do! Scream loud enough to wake the dead, and then kill them again by blowing up their eardrums? Your throat is badly damaged! It'll take more than one day to heal completely, even with my best Sore-Throat potion! Well, I'll give you many dosages to take for the rest of the day and tomorrow. In the mean time, drink this: it's nasty but it will help to make the pain go away or at least freeze your throat so you won't feel it."

Harry took the vial and studied it carefully. He plucked the lid off and took a sniff; it didn't smell anything, and that, he did not like. But hey! The man was a qualified MediWizard and no Death-Eater, so he gulped the content in one swing...immediately regretting it. His face contorted into a grimacing pout and the doctor laughed at him heartily.

"You're quite the courageous young man, Mr. Evans! Not many people have the guts to drink the entire vial in one go! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Harry shot him a dark look but the doctor ignored it in favor of ogling at his scar, with a more serious expression.

That...Harry disliked even more than having the doctor near centimeters from his face with a stick stuck on his tongue.

Harry fidgeted uneasily, trying to turn his head slightly so the man got the point. He didn't want the MediWizard trying to make the scar disappear; Harry knew the damn thing was impossible to hide, let alone heal. He had killed his Voldemort and it hadn't disappeared, so he knew that the scar was there to stay.

He almost snorted ironically; his own branding mark: Harry Potter, Boy-Who-Lived-And-Killed-Voldemort, center of all Prophecies, Seeker Extraordinaire, Master in the Dark Arts, Unregistered Animagus...and the list continued like that for a while.

With all his tensing, he felt Nagini coil more tightly around his middle, as if the snake was ready to make its move. Surreptitiously, his hand brushed his stomach, and against the Cobra, to make Nagini calm herself.

He then shook his head away from the doctor's inquisitive gaze.

"Please don't touch it. This scar... is a part of who I am." His heart constricted painfully in his chest at his own words but it was necessary. The doctor could not know it was a Curse Scar, or else it would alert him and bring attention on himself. And with all of this he felt a coldness in his throat; the blue potion had been somewhat effective, though it still hurt when he talked too much.

The man backed away with a dejected expression, as if studying that scar would have really been interesting and a mystery to solve. "Alright, but you said you had a headache, right? I thought that maybe this scar was what started it in the first place. It is rather peculiar..."

Harry shrugged to the man but mentally tensed. The doctor had no idea how near to the truth he was right now...or how near he had come to meeting a very irritable ex-servant, although under Imperious at that time, of Voldemort.

After a good dosage of Headache-Relieving potion, Harry sighed and finally slackened in his chair.

The MediWizard cracked a grin. "There, all better. Did I forget something or is everything okay now?"

Harry opened his mouth, hesitated, and closed it, shaking his head negatively back and forth. He just didn't see himself asking for a bottle of Dreamless Sleep potion in its maximum concentration; now

THAT would have arisen suspicion. "No. Thank you very much for everything."

The man raised an eyebrow and then shrugged, leading James out of the office to get the vials of Sore-Throat potion he needed. "Now, Mr. Evans, you will need to drink half of a vial every hour until your throat stop burning. Don't overdo-it and get plenty of rest."

Harry nodded at the typical doctor speech and floored back to The Three Broomsticks, which had started to fill up during his absence. Being winter and all, it was starting to get dark outside already, though it was only around three in the afternoon.

The few students present yelped and backed away quickly as the Floo activated and a long, dark haired boy emerged from it clumsily. His tired and dark look must've scared them because they changed tables and went as far as possible from the Floo, all huddled up together in a tight group formation.

Harry almost snorted; they were third year Hufflepuffs and he recognized some of them, if not somewhat vaguely. He didn't dwell on this because Rosmerta all but jumped on him with a face set between a full blown grin and a concerned expression.

"JAMES!" She latched onto him and said boy winced when the customers' attention turned to them, especially on him from the students' part.

Harry mentally winced and walked where they would be more comfortable and in private. The five Hufflepuffs eyed the newcomer curiously and with wide eyes as a snowy white owl flew to the black haired boy's shoulder. The pub owner and he walked by them to go in the kitchens.

"I think you've impressed the kids!" laughed Rosmerta as she motioned for James to sit.

James, however, gave her a sullen look. "Either that or I've scared them shitless," he said in a half-whisper.

Rosmerta raised an eyebrow, but ignored the comment. "Your throat seems a little bit better but I think it would be best for you to follow the MediWizard's advice and get some rest. I've managed Hogsmeade weekends alone before, you don't have to worry about me."

But the black haired boy shook his head negatively. "It'll be alright. You'll need my help," he whispered.

Rosmerta sighed, not really knowing what to do; the boy was obviously very tired and could barely talk, but on the other hand the students always asked for a lot of attention.

"I think I have an idea. Since you really want to help me I'll let you, but you'll only start at five. In the mean time I want you to go back to your room to get some shut-eye, and don't forget to take your medication. And if the work gets too tedious for you then you'll got back to get the rest you deserve."

James opened his mouth, and then closed it soundly, nodding his head. It seemed like a good compromise. He could at least get two hours of 'sleep' before the rush, if his dreams permitted it.

"I'll see you at five, then." And with that, James exited the kitchens, walked by the same wondering group of third years without even glancing at them and went to his bedroom upstairs.

He spelled his door again and took his cloak off with a sigh. Nagini slithered down his waist and went back to her favorite place on the bed. "Finally! I never thought this human would let you go! Why are you forcing yourself to go to work when you need your sleep? This place is going to be filled with noisy and insufferable children; it's not the atmosphere you need right now!" the Cobra admonished him.

Harry merely gave her a pat on the head and sprawled down on his bed. Truth is, he would try not to talk to anyone, and not just because his voice didn't cooperate at the moment.

He didn't want anyone getting too friendly with him right now; they would be at risk. He had always preferred to fight alone before, at least ever since his Sirius died. He was also older and wiser, and knew that life wasn't a game more than anyone else.

He had even gained the respect of the Snape from his world, so he made it his business to look imposing and not to slouch. He always held himself proudly and straight, and that was probably what had somewhat scared the third year Hufflepuffs moments before.

Harry also knew he wasn't a Light Wizard, neither an Evil one. But he knew very Dark Magic and his mind had had its share of Unforgivables. He was a Dark Wizard, not Evil like Voldemort, but he wasn't going to tell this to the whole world.

For them, Dark meant Evil; there was no shade in between. What a foolish world.

With those last thoughts, his eyelids got heavier and finally he succumbed to slumber.

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It hadn't been easy to get up when Nagini nudged him awake and now he groggily made his way down the stairs, not bothering to put his cloak on; the Cobra had decided to take the boy's place on the bed and Hedwig was still sleeping in her usual spot on the desk.

Rosmerta gave him a half-smile when she spotted him, and he made his way to her, ignoring the stares that followed him.

"James, sorry to say this, but you look like hell. Maybe it would be better for you to go back to bed."

The many students and other customers eyed the boy curiously as they tried to get bits of the conversation, whispering to each other about the newcomer's appearance; he looked too serious for a kid his age and somewhat dark. They watched as he shook his head and opened his mouth to reply, only to cough violently.

The boy retrieved a small vial from his pockets and opened the lid as Rosmerta put her hands on her hips and gave him a glare. "You didn't take your medication earlier? Remember what the MediWizard said! I don't want to have to forcefully send you back to St-Mungo's again!" she scolded him.

The adults in the place winced, knowing that Rosmerta could get very scary when mad, but they stared as it didn't affect the boy in the least. He merely gave a silent chuckle and downed about half the content of the mysterious vial obviously coming from St-Mungo's.

The boy grimaced at the taste but succeeded in smiling at the pub owner anyway. "Don't worry about me." Mentally, Harry grimaced. 'Don't worry indeed: I've been through worse anyway.'

Rosmerta sighed and looked heavenwards, knowing that the boy was as hard-headed as a Gryffindor student. "Okay, okay. Just deliver these plates to the students in the far corner and come back. There'll be more food ready in just a moment."

The boy nodded and took three plates at the same time, walking to the far corner of the tavern. 'Oh, swell, Slytherin students. Just my luck.'

Harry put his neutral face on as he recognized the green color of the lining on their cloaks, but couldn't tell who the students were or what they were talking about. 'Probably Voldemort,' Harry thought with a grimace. Since Riddle was still alive here, he was bound to have more followers.

He deposited the plates on the table, intruding in their conversation. Gregory Goyle, Vincent Crabbe and Draco Malfoy, seventh year Slytherins, studied him carefully and Malfoy glared. "Who the hell are you? I've never seen you before here."

Harry kept his face neutral, only lifting an eyebrow at the blonde's choice of words. Draco Malfoy certainly was more ruthless here, and obviously a Death Eater by the looks in his cold and arrogant grey eyes.

But Harry wasn't going to tell him that. He swallowed the hatred he felt before his magic could go haywire and merely replied: "I'm James Evans, and am indeed new here."

As he was about to turn around to get more plates, the blonde boy gripped his arm. "Hey! You a Pureblood or a Mudblood, Evans?"

Harry looked at him unperturbedly. "I'm half-and-half, but more this half than the other."

He regained possession of his arm once more with a sharp tug and left three very confused, not to mention irate Slytherins. Malfoy turned around and poked at his food, glaring down at it as if he wanted to melt the plate down. "I don't like that guy...and he looks too much like –Black- for my tastes."

Goyle and Crabbe stayed silent but obviously on the same side as Draco.

Harry's long bangs covered his eyes as he smiled darkly to himself. He wasn't about to tell everyone he had Voldemort's powers as well as his own. Seeing him smile to himself like this made a pretty disturbing and scary picture for the younger students present and those who were standing hastily made way for him to pass.

He had just talked with one of the nastiest people in Hogwarts! He wasn't to be trusted!

In the mean time, Harry took more plates and walked in the direction of a table full of Gryffindors, to their great horror.

As he made his way to them, Harry took his time to look around; no traces of Ron or Hermione anywhere. Not even Seamus or Dean, who also liked to come here once in a while. In fact, the only Gryffindors here were between third and sixth year.

No sign of his friends; maybe they all had something to do and stayed back at Hogwarts? Or it was probable that they decided not to come only because Malfoy was here. Rivaling House animosity, no doubt.

But he was happy to see that sixth year Colin Creevey and his younger brother Denis were here with some of their friends. He put the plates down and gave a small smile to the group. They tensed, but the dark haired boy was completely relaxed and showed no sign of hostility towards them.

Colin gulped and stuttered "Uh, t-thanks." The older boy nodded and, with one last look at them and a "you're welcome", he fetched some other plates.

"Are you nuts, Colin?" Denis Creevey gaped at his older brother. "Now he'll recognize you wherever you go and maybe even try to kill you! You saw Malfoy talking to him as much as we did!"

Colin gulped in fear; he knew his brother was being a tad overly dramatic but that didn't ease the scary feeling in his guts.

A Hufflepuff who was with them nodded fervently, eyeing the new waiter with great distrust. "Just look at him! He looks so dark, with his fierce gaze and posture! He can't possibly be good!"

Colin's face became pale and he pushed his plate aside. "Thanks guys, you've just spoiled my dinner. M'not hungry anymore. Let's go back to Hogwarts."

They all nodded, all too eager to get out of there. They had the unpleasant feeling, as they paid and walked outside, that deep blue eyes followed their movements until they closed the door.

Harry sighed as he gave an old wizard his plate. 'It's as things should be, for now. Can't get close to anyone.' And with that, he continued to give the orders away, until every student was gone, Malfoy and his goons included.

Rosmerta smiled at him as he sat down and gulped the other half of the vial. "You've done a very good job today! The students were really calm compared to other times! I think your looks scared them!" she laughed.

But Harry didn't find it funny in the least. He answered absentmindedly "Things are as they should be."

Rosmerta gave him a funny gaze. "What?"

Harry snapped out of his reverie and shook his head, got up, yawned and stretched. "Nothing. Sorry, I was babbling nonsense. I think I'll go to bed now."

The woman nodded while giving him a calculating look. "You do that, James."

I hope you liked! NEXT CHAPTER: Colin will get into trouble! James to the rescue! It will be a dangerous first encounter with the new world's Death Eaters. Hmm, familiar faces?

Review!

Eternal Cosmos
Chapter 5: Encounter

The next two weeks passed smoothly for Harry. His days were spent at about the same rhythm: work, sleep, walk around, and go to Diagon Alley to make some purchases for Rosmerta.

Each time he went to Diagon Alley, he didn't miss the chance to go to Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor even though it was cold outside: it was the best ice cream around. He kept clear of people and people kept clear of him.

He had gained the reputation of being mysterious and a possible Death Eater in Hogsmeade, a huge insult for Harry, but at least nobody tried to arrest him since they had no proofs and he had done nothing wrong.

He also had Rosmerta's trust on his side: the woman was popular in the wizarding world.

He hadn't met any of Voldemort's servants yet, Death Eaters and Dementors included, but he kept himself informed of their whereabouts by means of the Daily Oracle. But Hogsmeade had been silent for too long and Harry felt that it wasn't going to be long before Tom attacked the small village.

The students always stayed clear of him during Hogsmeade weekends. Harry had once thought he had spotted Seamus walking in the street but it was during one of his shifts so he hadn't been able to go outside to confirm it really was the Gryffindor seventh year.

Malfoy had also been avoiding The Three Broomsticks, to Harry's appreciation. Xiomara Hooch kept her habit of coming at least once per week, if only to talk about Quidditch with him. The first year students had become more skilled on a broom so her classes were less hectic, thank God for her.

But this peaceful life couldn't last forever.

The day started as a quiet Sunday of yet another Hogsmeade weekend. Colin Creevey and his friends had decided to go to Honeydukes since their supplies of candies were running low.

He was accompanied by his younger brother, as always, and other members of Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff houses. They always walked around in groups, and since they all wanted to go to Hogsmeade they had decided to go together.

Surprisingly, they didn't go to The Three Broomsticks -maybe it was their fear of the strange boy working there- but spent the whole day lurking around and having some fun. Gladrags, Scrivenshaft's quill shop, Zonko's joke shop, Dervish and Banges, you name it!

The time passed quickly, and soon they had to go back to Hogwarts before the sun completely set. The group decided it was time to go, but Colin ignored them. He joked around and was having too much of a blast to listen to them and continued to trek around.

Luna Lovegood, who was with them at that time, looked at the sky and shivered. "You guys, we better go back to the castle. It's starting

to get dark out there! Colin will have to wake up from his little fun trip one time or another; we'll just make fun of him when he comes back to Hogwarts yelling at us to wait for him."

The others laughed and nodded, all too eager to get out of there. And so they went back to Hogwarts, along with every other student who was at the village.

Meanwhile, Harry was being sent to Dervish and Banges by Rosmerta. One of the magical coffee machines had started to go crazy and spray everyone passing by, so the woman had had to put a Petrificus Totalus spell on it to stop it.

So now Harry was going to the magical repair shop to get it fixed. The old wizard working there grunted at the dark haired boy as a welcome and told him to put the machine on the counter.

Harry told the repairman what the problem was and the old man nodded thoughtfully. "Okay. But I'll have to keep it for tonight. I don't have the time to repair it now; I have to clean the store."

Harry looked around and indeed, he hadn't noticed that the shop was in shambles, as if a tornado had passed. "What happened here?" Harry asked curiously.

The man grunted and muttered to himself. "It's those kids from Hogwarts! Little messengers of Satan they are! Ran around in the shop just for their own pleasure when they should have gone back to Hogwarts! I saw one of them walk around still just ten minutes ago, and it's way past his time to go back to the school. He was all alone too; his friends were cleverer than him."

He continued to mutter to himself but Harry wasn't listening anymore. His false blue eyes narrowed into slits, and he walked out of the shop, only to hear people start screaming in fear.

A witch almost ran into him and she clutched at his shoulders. "THEY'RE HERE! THEY'VE BEEN SPOTTED!!! GO BACK TO THE THREE BROOMSTICKS, KID!" She was completely mad and looked around wildly with a terrified expression.

Harry detangled himself from her tight hold and kept his calm. "Who's been sighted?" he asked with a frown and a sudden foreboding feeling.

"THE DEATH EATERS!!! AHHH!" And with one last scream she ran away to find shelter in her house, leaving a worried boy behind.

Death Eaters had been sighted, but they weren't in Hogsmeade, as it seem. So that only meant one thing: they were on their way to Hogwarts.

What about the student that was traveling alone not too long ago? Was he on his way back to Hogwarts as well? The simple thought of it made Harry stop thinking and dash towards the trail leading to the castle...the trail situated right next to the Forbidden Forest.

"Merlin, I hope I'm not too late!" he prayed, and fastened his cloak and his hood tightly. He felt the sudden freezing air attack his senses as he ran through the shield around the village, and he disappeared through the thickness of the night...forgetting about Hedwig and Nagini, who were waiting for him at The Three Broomsticks.

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Colin shivered for the tenth time and dared to peak a nervous glance behind him, hitting himself mentally for not listening to the others. He desperately wanted to walk faster but the thick snow and the cold made it impossible.

His Gryffindor courage had deserted him a while ago, with good reasons, and he yelped in fright at any suspicious sound that came out of the eerie forest. A twig snapped and he froze, his body taut and his shaking hand slowly lowered to get his wand.

But as soon as he retrieved the piece of wood and brought it to eye level, he was hit by the Expelliarmus spell and screamed as he was thrown back into a tree with such a force that he blacked-out.

As a result, he didn't hear the dark chuckles that echoed in the chilling atmosphere.

Harry heard the scream all too clearly, which confirmed his fear. He tried to run faster but cursed loudly as the snow slowed him down. "Ah, fuck this!" he muttered darkly and transformed into his counterpart animagus form, swiftly soaring through the air to the endangered boy with a renewed determination.

The two Death Eaters advanced on the unconscious boy with a sick eagerness. "What a foolish little boy we have caught! And a Gryffindor, too! What should we do with him? Kill him now or bring him to our Lord?" the first one asked while he fiddled impatiently with his wand.

His accomplice chuckled darkly. "How about we torture him first? It's a good compromise."

The first one nodded enthusiastically and both brandished their wand. But the next thing they knew, they were both thrown backwards by a vicious gust of wind, at the same time hearing a loud and obviously not too thrilled cry that cut the air like a knife through butter.

The Death Eaters got up hastily; the beast that had knocked them over had sounded pretty big. But as they prepared to curse the creature, they froze. There was no beast around, at least not anymore, but a cloaked person was standing protectively in front of the student.

"Who the Hell are you?!" the second Death Eater asked in an angry shout, but they received no answers and no plaintive sounds. This person was standing calmly before them, and with great confidence.

"What should we do?" the first man asked harshly.

The other scoffed. "I didn't think there still existed foolishly brave people like that anymore: to go against us, and thus challenging the Dark Lord so openly. Except that muggle-loving fool Dumbledore and

his faithful little followers, that is. We should bring him to our master so he can kill this idiot himself.”

As they debated over his fate, Harry had the time to take a swift glance towards Colin; he was still out of it.

The Boy-Who-Lived knew that even if they were outnumbering him, he still had the advantage: he knew who he was facing, and they did not. Death Eaters had the tendency to underestimate their enemies. And in all his years of fighting Voldemort, he had seen all of his followers and knew how to recognize them by voice and how they acted.

As such, he knew that the second one was the leader of this little duo, and Harry sneered; he never thought he would see Lucius Malfoy so soon.

The other one was Antonin Dolohov, no less dangerous and always eager to please his Lord and torture innocents, the son-of-a-bitch.

“I never thought I’d see you two so soon after I arrived. Pity I can’t kill you today; I don’t feel like being accused of murder right now, especially since one of you IS working for the ministry.”

The two Death Eaters froze and looked towards him, holding their wands up threateningly. “You! How can you even propose such a thing?!”

Under his cloak, Harry smiled darkly. “Because I know who you are. I know who all of you are, actually.”

The two men tensed visibly and the second one, whom Harry had identified as Lucius Malfoy, asked forcefully; “Who the Hell are you anyway?!”

Harry decided to have his fun with them and dropped the glamour momentarily, slowly lifting his hand to lower his hood. Both men’s eyes widened when they got a view, unclear because of the snow, granted, but small enough to see a set of two glowing green eyes

gazing back at them with such intensity that Dolohov momentarily thought that the Killing Curse had been used.

“He’s just a kid! A runt like the other one!” Malfoy shook off his surprise and sneered. This kid couldn’t be that great; he was probably only boasting. And it took more than mere boasting to scare a Malfoy. “You have some nerve to try to intimidate us, brat! Tell me your name, so I can go laugh on your tombstone after I end your life!”

The dark servants laughed evilly but the boy merely smirked and put his hood back on and activated the glamour again. “My name is irrelevant right now. Though, if you insist on calling me something, you can call me the Boy-Who-Lived.”

He retrieved his wand from his pocket and stepped backwards into the Forbidden Forest when Dolohov tried to hit him with the Cruciatus curse. Using the darkness around him to his advantage and blend in so he couldn’t be seen, Harry laughed out loud at them mockingly as Dolohov missed his target by a few meters on his right.

“HOW DARE YOU MAKE FUN OF US, BOY!? NO ONE DARES TO MOCK US, THAT IS, ONLY IF THEY HAVE A DEATH WISH!” Gone was the ever calm and aristocratic Malfoy; he was raging, livid mad.

They were preparing to cast nasty hexes at the same time in the direction of the Forbidden Forest when the daring kid suddenly sprung up from the darkness and took them by surprise with his swiftness. Harry quickly decided to use a new spell he had learned during the warring period of his old world, a spell that wouldn’t make them forget about him anytime soon. “Lacero!”

He waved his wand and hit both Death Eaters at the same time, lowering his voice so they wouldn’t hear the spell he just used.

Malfoy and Dolohov never saw it coming; this feeling was comparable to the Cruciatus, but wasn’t the second Unforgivable at all. They screamed in pain and both fell in the deep snow, twisting and crying out as they felt the pain tearing up their skin and insides. It was as if

this unknown spell was utilized to shred someone's whole being to bits until they either passed-out or died.

Harry smirked sadistically, a trait he had gained from facing Voldemort and seeing him do it so many times. It was good to be the one in power!

But Harry frowned as one of the subdued Death Eaters managed to crawl VERY painfully towards his wand and before Harry could do anything, he was hit with the Cutting hex all along his left arm, piercing the dragonhide cloak neatly around that same area.

That made him grunt and stop the spell he was using on them; they got up quickly, not without moaning in pain, though, and didn't waste their time to Apparate away to get away from him.

Harry ignored the pain in his arm and snorted loudly at their hasty retreat. He now had the Death Eaters' attention, exactly what he wanted. But they would be searching for the mysterious one who called himself the 'Boy-Who-Lived'. Not Harry Potter, not James Evans. Harry smirked; they would be in one hell of a search party later!

He heard a faint and muffled sound behind him and turned around swiftly, pointing his wand at whatever was trying to sneak up behind him. Colin Creevey, looking very beat up but otherwise as energetic as ever, raised his hands in the air and squeaked.

The disguised boy sighed audibly and lowered his wand. "Don't sneak up behind me again," he said neutrally, but it sounded more like a serious advice than a threat.

Colin quickly regained his usual bearings and looked at the hooded person with admiration in his wide eyes, making Harry squirm mentally; had Colin seen his true face?

"WOW! You made them go away! That was so cool! What spell did you use against them? Can you show me?"

Harry rolled his eyes. Colin was as obvious and obnoxious as ever; he was just grateful the younger Gryffindor didn't have his faithful counterpart with him –his camera-. “No, I won't show you. Just go back to your school,” he mumbled, preparing to go back to Hogsmeade.

But as he turned around he felt Colin grip his cloak tightly. “You're hurt! Come back with me to Hogwarts, I'm sure Mme Pomfrey will accept to heal you; she's the best MediWitch around and she helps people from Hogsmeade sometimes! And anyway, what if ‘they’ return?” The blonde boy pressed the subject and pulled him towards Hogwarts.

Harry sighed and relented; he was too tired to argue and Colin was right. Malfoy could very well come back with some other friends of his.

But when the castle came in his clear line of view, Harry didn't think it was such a good idea anymore. Was he ready to see everyone he loved alive but ignorant about whom he was? Even more, were they ready for him? A strange, mysterious, secretive boy with a power that isn't to be trifled with and with an unknown goal? A boy that behaved somewhat darkly and had the personality of someone who had seen too many deaths and fought more than his young age would normally allow?

Harry knew he had gained some disturbing, and even dangerous, characteristics in all his years of serving as a target, puppet and weapon for the Wizarding world. He was more afraid of hurting an innocent kid who was trying to pull a joke on him than the Headmaster looking sternly at him. ‘CONSTANT VIGILANCE!’ had been engraved in his mind and his reflexes were deadly.

But it was already too late to back down; Colin had opened the huge door and walked in, pulling him inside with fervor. The young Gryffindor squeaked nervously and stopped suddenly in his steps, making Harry almost walk into the other's back; he looked at what had caused Colin's surprise and was surprisingly not shocked to see the Headmaster, Severus Snape and Minerva McGonagall looking at their charge with relief, and then at him with sudden wariness.

“Twenty points off Gryffindor for disrespect of the rules, Mr. Creevey! The curfew for Hogsmeade weekends is five o’clock, is it not?” Severus Snape asked with a sneer.

Harry didn’t know if this Severus Snape could be trusted, but it felt good to see the Potions teacher act like Harry was used to see him act.

The boy gulped under the Potions Master’s intense gaze and stuttered his explanation nervously. “W-well, professor...” Colin started nervously, and Snape was about to snap at him when Albus interfered, the twinkle Harry was used to seeing almost non-existent in the old eyes.

“What happened, Mr. Creevey? You look quite ruffled.”

“Uh, I was attacked by D-Death Eaters...”

Albus’ eyes narrowed, as well as Snape’s, but Minerva gasped in fright. Before she could start to fuss about his wellbeing, Colin continued, this time pointing enthusiastically towards the cloaked stranger. “But he saved me! I was unconscious because I was thrown into a tree but when I woke up I saw him throw a spell at them both and they fell in the snow, screaming like mad! And then one of them was able to get his wand and he threw the- Oh! The Cutting hex!” Colin remembered and stopped in mid-phrase, turning towards his savior.

“You got hit pretty badly by the Cutting hex! I almost forgot! It must hurt so much!”

Harry blinked, just now remembering about the throbbing ache in his left arm.

“I brought him with me so Mme Pomfrey could heal him! Please professor Dumbledore! Punish me if you want but help him! He saved my life back there!” Colin asked with a desperate tone of voice.

The headmaster smiled softly. "Mr. Creevey, you don't have to beg. I'm not the kind of person who will let people suffer. And you will come with us to the infirmary so Poppy can check you up at the same time." He then turned towards the newcomer. "I thank you for saving Colin. These times of war are dangerous and we can't afford to lose any of our precious children who will create their own future someday." Albus bowed his head.

Harry lowered his hood and bowed back silently, his eyes held downcast and his facial expression serious. When he looked back at them, he didn't miss Albus', Snape's and Colin's eyes widen slightly and Minerva gasp silently. He knew he would get these expressions; he did look like Sirius, if only slightly different and quite younger. "What?"

They all rasped their throat and looked elsewhere. Dumbledore motioned for Harry to follow him and they all trekked quietly towards the Infirmary.

"You look like one of my teachers," Colin whispered disturbingly, walking beside him just to evade Snape's unsettling glare.

Harry raised an eyebrow but didn't comment.

"Mr. Creevey is right, you know. You do look a lot like our Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher: Sirius Black. What is your name, young man?" the Headmaster asked curiously, trying to seize him up.

"I get that a lot from the people in Hogsmeade. I'm used to hearing this. Anyway, my name is James Evans," he answered softly.

Snape sneered at the obvious muggle name. "Well, Mr. Evans, you look quite young to be out of school! And what were you doing on the trail between Hogwarts and Hogsmeade at this hour for starters? It's almost nine thirty!" The Potions Master was obviously trying to pull one of his intimidating tricks to make him spill his secrets but it didn't have any effect on Evans.

“My old school was destroyed, so there’s no point talking about it. I’m seventeen, but I think I know enough to survive. I found myself a job at The Three Broomsticks a couple of weeks ago to occupy my time. I was in the repair shop when the owner told me that a kid was still wandering around just ten minutes ago and when I walked outside the shop people were screaming that Death Eaters had been spotted.”

The black haired boy shrugged. “I guess I reacted on instinct.”

Snape didn’t seem to find it funny that the stranger had answered all of his questions but he kept quiet. There was an aura around him that he found troubling, the Headmaster had probably already felt it, but the only thing they could do was stay on their guard until they got confirmation from Rosmerta.

Dumbledore asked Colin and James to sit down on a bed and he called the matron.

“What’s going on, Albus? Who hexed who this time, and at this hour? Malfoy? Weasley?” Poppy Pomfrey arrived but lifted her eyebrows when three solemn adults, sixteen years old Colin Creevey and a boy she had never seen gazed back at her.

The corners of Albus’ mouth quirked up a bit at the mention of Malfoy and Weasley; those two hated each other with a vengeance and always landed themselves into the infirmary after a confrontation.

Harry stayed quiet, even if his heart started to beat faster at the mention of his (dead) best friend. ‘No, he doesn’t know who I am, here. He’s not the same Ron.’ He told himself.

“They’ve been attacked by two Death Eaters, Poppy. Well, Mr. Creevey has been attacked, and Mr. Evans right here apparently saved his life. Can you take a look at them, please?” Albus asked, ignoring the nurse’s gasp at the mention of another attack on a student.

She rushed towards the two boys and started to fuss over Colin. After a couple of minutes, and a couple of 'OW!' from the blonde Gryffindor when she touched the back of his head, she tutted and muttered a healing spell with her wand.

The bump deflated and Colin sighed in relief. She gave him a small vial of headache-relieving potion and he drank it without being asked twice. "Mr. Creevey has the permission to go back to his dormitory. It was a nasty bump but nothing too serious. Now it's your turn, mister..."

The black haired boy smiled very faintly; his eyes were hollow and tired. "James Evans, madam Pomfrey. I'm sorry to cause you such trouble at this hour."

Poppy nodded but refused to believe he was causing her trouble; he had just saved one of the students from the Death Eaters, for Merlin's sake! What was he apologizing for?!

"It's no trouble at all, Mr. Evans. It's my job to heal people. Now let me take a look at this arm, will you? Mr. Creevey said you were hit by a Cutting hex?"

'James' nodded and started to take his cloak off, a twitch of his eye the only sign of feeling something from the movement. No wince, no hiss, no moan of soreness...surely it couldn't be that bad.

Colin was trying to steal a look over Poppy's shoulder at the wound, oblivious as ever. But Snape, Dumbledore and Minerva, even if their demeanor was relaxed, were waiting for him to uncover his -left- arm with all the seriousness in the world.

Harry sighed silently, put the cloak aside and took off his sweater, but not without difficulty. His left arm was literally soaked in blood, but Severus told himself that sometimes cuts could appear worse than they actually were.

But as Poppy disinfected the cut, even he had to stare at the impressive wound. Dumbledore and Minerva looked as shocked at

the others, but managed to nod imperceptibly to each other; other than the bleeding gash, the arm was unmarked. They truly relaxed and let Madam Pomfrey do her work.

“My Lord! Was it really the Cutting hex that did that?! You were really hit head on! I’m surprised that you didn’t pass out from blood loss or even cried out in pain from moving this arm!” And she was right: it wasn’t a cut, it was a slash, and a big one, starting a little below his shoulder and going down his arm to stop at his wrist. That was dangerous. And he had been hit with such force that the spell had literally cut through his skin to the bone, which had also been damaged.

“You’ll need to stay here for the night, I’m afraid. There’s no way I’m letting you out of my sight until you’re completely healed. Lie down on the bed to your left and make yourself comfortable while I get a vial of Skele-Grow.” Poppy grimaced when she mentioned the nasty tasting, and very painful potion.

Minerva had shooed the restless and mildly uncooperative Colin away in the mean time, and when Poppy returned she started her work by mending the sliced skin with her healing magic, yet she put his arm into a strap that would prevent it from moving.

She then transfigured his clothes into a comfortable pajama and gave him the vial he had to drink. “You were very lucky back there, young man. The dragonhide cloak created a resistance and helped to slow the force of the spell down. If you hadn’t been wearing this, the entire bone in your arm would have been severed,” Poppy said with a disgusted grimace at the mental image. “And this potion will hurt.”

They were once again surprised when the boy nodded absentmindedly and downed the entire content of the vial. The only explanation he offered to their shocked faces was: “I know the effects of this potion. It’s not the first time I take it.”

When the Headmaster raised an inquisitive eyebrow, Harry clarified his answer. “It was in my second year in my old school. We had a real incompetent fool as a Defense teacher and when I broke my arm

during a Quidditch match the idiot didn't wait for the nurse and tried to put my bones back into place. Instead, he made them completely disappear. I don't remember how many doses of Skele-Grow I had to take but it did hurt like hell. This gash will be nothing compared to it."

Poppy shook her head and tutted again at the mention of someone other than a MediWizard taking care of a patient.

The black haired boy started to yawn and he leaned into the bed. Poppy shooed the three other adults out of the infirmary and told them it would be best for them to go to bed. She was very tired herself and she didn't feel like awakening all grumpy next morning. With one last look at the boy in the bed, she 'Noxed' the light out and went to sleep herself.

Harry opened one eye and, when he was sure that no one was around, he cast a silencing spell around his bed. This done, he finally succumbed to sleep.

Well, what do you think? (grins) Next chapter: Harry wakes up and meets more of the staff (wink, wink!) and sees his 'friends'. But he really has to go back...because he forgot a certain easily angered creature back at the pub...hmmm...

Thank you to those who reviewed last time and gave their opinion about the poll! The poll result is at the beginning of the chapter, if you didn't read it. Hope this satisfies everyone! HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!!

PLEASE REVIEW!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos ;)

Chapter 6: She's going to kill me

Harry woke up with a groan in a very familiar environment and with a very familiar face looking down at him with scrutiny. Madam Pomfrey bustled around him, prodding him absentmindedly and asking him if this or that hurt.

“I’m fine, Madam Pomfrey,” the boy said exasperatedly with a heaving sigh, and tried to sit up to prove his point. It didn’t have the wanted effect as a searing pain erupted in his arm; apparently it was still overly sore and not quite healed yet.

He let out a hiss when he moved his strapped arm and the nurse was immediately tutting at him and examining his arm from all angles possible without moving it too much.

Harry rolled his eyes but knew better than to try to retaliate, so he let her dose him with a vial of pain-reducing potion.

He welcomed the numbing sensation and relaxed, taking this time to observe the infirmary; it looked the same as the one from his old world, except from the facts that there were many more shelves lining the wall, probably because Voldemort attacked regularly and didn’t let people escape unscathed, when not dead.

Poppy smiled at him and told him he was free to get up. “I bet you are hungry, Mr. Evans. Come with me; it’s almost time for breakfast and I don’t think the Headmaster will mind if you take a seat beside me. He doesn’t have the habit of letting people starve, especially injured people. I still don’t want to have you out of my sight; the injury you have can easily reopen, even with the bind I put on your arm.”

Harry opened his mouth to reply but shut it tightly when she sent him the ‘you-will-do-as-I-say look’. “Fine. I am a bit hungry anyway,” he replied tiredly, and set off towards the Great Hall, following the MediWitch dutifully.

Walking in the familiar corridors sent a sudden burst of nostalgia in him; the last time he had seen Hogwarts it had been partially destroyed in the final war.

There were a few students already up and walking about, hanging around or going to the Great Hall. Some moved to greet the nurse but when they spotted him they stopped and gazed at him apprehensively and curiously.

Poppy seemed to think it was necessary to make a long detour and make this a small visit of the castle, explaining which class were on what floor and whatnot. Harry nodded distractedly; he knew all of this already, but he didn't want to appear rude or all-knowing about Hogwarts.

By the time they reached the Great Hall, it had already filled up by more than half of its populace. Nobody really noticed him or the nurse as he tried not to stare and stop his legs from giving away at the entrance of the immense dining room.

But when Colin noticed him, the blonde Gryffindor smiled a smile that reached his ears and he waved madly at him. "JAMES! JAMES!"

Poppy laughed as 'James' winced and tensed at the sudden and visibly unwanted attention. Everyone's attention turned to him and he straightened, setting his face in a neutral expression.

'Oh God!' Harry mentally choked and tried to hold back his tears. 'Sirius! It's Sirius! He's there, oh God! In one piece! Alive! He's looking straight at me! Oh God! Is that Remus?!' He was in total shock. Even with his Occlumency abilities he was unable to get his breathing to get even, though he did not appear restless at all to the naked eye.

Indeed, Remus Lupin was sitting right beside Sirius, and both were looking at him strangely, although guardedly.

Colin all but assaulted him when he walked by the younger blonde, until Madam Pomfrey had to push him away; the numbing potion had its limits and Colin was prodding him a little too much for his tastes.

“James! You’re okay! You heal pretty fast, don’t you? That wound the Death Eater gave you was pretty bloody!”

The other Gryffindors who usually hung out with Colin looked at him as if he was crazy; it was that mysterious dark haired boy from The Three Broomsticks! What was Colin thinking??! Denis Creevey walked warily towards his brother with an uncertain look. “Death Eater? What happened yesterday, Colin? You never told us.”

The oldest brother was about to reply when Madam Pomfrey huffed and pulled James by his good arm towards the teachers’ table. “Why don’t you sit down and eat your breakfast, Mister Creevey? Mr. Evans may heal extraordinarily fast but he’s not impervious to everything. You can tell your friends how deep in trouble you were yesterday because of your little jaunt.”

Colin blushed furiously and sat down, muttering ‘sorry!’ under his breath.

Harry never thought his heart could beat so wildly; not even against Voldemort had he been that much under the assault of adrenaline.

Madam Pomfrey merely smiled as if nothing was wrong, totally oblivious to the discomfort of the boy she dragged behind her. As they walked behind the head table and consequently Severus Snape, the Potions Master barely even acknowledged him, which made Harry look heavenwards: he was still the same here, it seemed.

“Albus, he woke up not too long ago and I gave him the permission to get up. Can he have a place beside me? I don’t want him to leave my side just yet,” Madam Pomfrey asked the Headmaster.

Albus nodded with a small smile and transfigured another chair for James to sit in. “Of course. You must be hungry, Mr. Evans. Eat all you want, it’s the least we can do after what you did for Mr. Creevey yesterday.”

James held his breath, sat down and nodded imperceptibly. "Thanks." Harry found his voice had almost deserted him and he fidgeted under the many stares he was still getting, which made his stomach churn; he wasn't so hungry anymore, all of a sudden.

He could feel Sirius and Remus spying at him out the corner of their eyes and his heartbeat accelerated still.

"What happened to Mister Creevey yesterday?" Sirius Black asked Albus. It was his chance to gaze at the newcomer who looked almost like him.

Remus also found this fact disturbing and he wasn't the only one. Harry tried to relax and reign in his magic and stop his heart from beating so loudly; surely the Werewolf could hear his heartbeat no problem, but if he did he never commented on it.

They could hear tidbits of information coming from the loud Colin Creevey at his table, who was certainly telling his friends what had happened to him yesterday with all the details he could remember, and Harry could see that he was receiving even more stares from the students who were listening to the tale.

He couldn't stand it and threw a nasty scowl at them: it made the kids look back at their table, a slight fear present in their eyes.

He felt someone else glance at him from his side only to look at Severus Snape, who had an inquisitive eyebrow lifted at him with a wary expression.

Harry ignored it with another scowl.

Albus was unmindful of all this silent communication and of the sudden stiffness in the air and he opened his mouth to answer the Defense teacher. "Well-"

"James? JAMES! It IS you! I can't believe it!"

They were all surprised to see Xiomara Hooch come out of the side entrance and call out the boy's name in such an outgoing manner. She strolled to him with a wide smile and slapped his back. "You devious boy, you! You never told me you were coming!"

"Oomph!" Harry winced when she slapped his back; his arm had received the repercussions of the hit and throbbed rather painfully.

Pomfrey was pushing the flying instructor not two seconds later and taking off his bandage to see if there was any damage, and the nurse sighed thankfully when the wound didn't reopen.

On the other hand, the teachers were ogling at the scarred slice on his arm with wide eyes. Xiomara was speechless. "O...kay. I don't think you're here for that Quidditch match you owe me, right?"

James gave her a look and, feeling self-conscious, he put the bandage back on. "Sorry Madam Xiomara, but that Quidditch match will have to wait," the boy answered with a slight humoring tone.

"How do you know each other?"

Xiomara turned towards Severus Snape with a raised eyebrow. "Severus, remember that time when you saw me come back from Hogsmeade really late and scared the hell out of me? I told you I hadn't been alone but you were already gone to scare more people. James here was the one who accompanied me back to Hogwarts. He works at The Three Broomsticks."

Minerva let out a breath she'd been holding. "Dear Merlin, is it your job to accompany people back and forth between the village and the school, Mister Evans?"

James scoffed at the small joke. "I was merely being courteous. Death Eaters don't scare me, they haven't for a long, long time."

Silence followed this statement; nobody really knew what to make of this and the atmosphere tensed again.

Sirius re-opened his mouth. "About what happened yesterday..." he let his phrase trail, a silent question Dumbledore had yet to answer.

The Headmaster raised an eyebrow towards James. "Actually, it is a question you should ask to this young man here, not me. He was there, not me."

James rasped his throat and took a bite of his breakfast. "Death Eaters attacked Colin on his way back to Hogwarts yesterday night. I got wind of a kid who had stayed after the curfew and villagers started to scream that Death Eaters had been sighted. I rushed there and helped Colin, end of the story."

Sirius raised an eyebrow at the overly short story. "And how DID you get rid of the Death Eaters?"

James sighed and closed his eyes. When he reopened them, two sets of blue eyes, although one set was false, clashed together. Harry's breath cut in his throat as he stared at his Godfather. Merlin! He wanted so much to tell Sirius everything just there and then! But he couldn't, wouldn't bring his Godfather into this mess. No more. Because he was sure that when the news of his existence would be discovered, the whole wizarding world, along with Voldemort who goes with the whole package, would know of him the day after.

When he looked at Sirius, he saw a man that hadn't gone to Azkaban for a murder he never committed, but still the man's eyes seemed hollow to the ones who knew him. Harry was one of those people.

Sirius fidgeted under the younger boy's stare. It was unnerving, as if the boy could somehow read his thoughts, his mind, his heart.

Then, the young stranger looked away to the crowd of eating students and spoke. "Tell me, have you ever lost important people to you, Mr. Black?"

The question surprised every one of the teachers. Sirius stuttered with a frown but Harry didn't let him answer. The boy scoffed at himself. "Of course, you've lost important people. Your eyes are proof enough. Well let me tell you something, Mister Black. I lost people too.

Too many. I never knew my parents; they were murdered when I was but a baby. I grew up in a place where I was hated and where magic was considered freaky. All my friends, teachers, and those I considered my family are dead because it took me too much time to do what had to be done. Colin needed to be saved; I did what I had to do.” Harry finished with an empty voice.

The atmosphere tensed again. It took Harry a couple of minutes to notice that he held his fork so tightly that his fist was white, and that a hand was covering his as a comforting gesture. The hand was connected to Xiomara Hooch, who wisely kept silent.

Harry mentally beat himself for opening his big mouth and breathed in deeply to calm himself. He worked on fortifying his mental wall with Occlumency and he cut every sound coming from around him.

While he worked on this, he gazed at the students. Only a couple of them were still looking at him, Colin included; most of them were more worried about their breakfast and classes.

He looked at the Ravenclaw table where Cho Chang and a very alive Cedric Diggory were engaged in a lively conversation. His heart recalled his fourth year and Harry slowly banished the thought from his mind. Surprisingly, Hermione was also seated at the Ravenclaw table, talking to another girl. Harry didn’t recall her name. They all seemed rather subdued, probably the influence of Voldemort, even if he didn’t have any power over the school yet.

The Slytherins held themselves proudly, and Harry noticed that Draco Malfoy was looking at him in a way he didn’t like at all. His two goons were flanked at the blonde’s side, as usual, and Pansy Parkinson was shamelessly attempting to seduce him.

‘Blegh! Things don’t seem to change.’

He sent Malfoy a dark smirk and it was gone as soon as it appeared. Malfoy obviously took this as an offense and Harry was sure that he would have to be careful with the Slytherin.

Deciding to look at something more welcoming, he gazed at the Gryffindor table where he noticed some red heads. Ron Weasley and his sister Ginny were talking with Dean Thomas, Seamus Finnegan and a nervous looking Neville; some things never changed indeed. Harry only hoped that Dumbledore hadn't put the job of killing Voldemort on Neville's back. Fair to say that Neville was the wrong boy for the job.

He blinked out of his reverie when the Gryffindor boys started to push Ron in the direction of the Ravenclaw table and he looked on curiously. Ronald stuttered for a moment but gained some assurance and he strolled confidently towards Hermione Granger.

Harry's eyebrow shot up above his forelocks when Ron kissed Hermione directly on the mouth, and he coughed when Hermione responded favorably.

He choked on his breakfast slightly and took a big gulp of his pumpkin juice. "Sorry about that," he muttered with a raspy voice when the teachers sent him curious looks, still trying to process what he had just seen.

The teachers, however, rolled their eyes and sighed. "Finally!" Xiomara exclaimed loudly.

Harry looked at her with wide eyes and she explained with a smile. "That boy is Ronald Weasley, you know, the one I talked to you about? Well, he's been courting young Miss Hermione Granger for quite some time now. Everyone knew they were going to get together and we were kind of tired to see Mr. Weasley run around the girl every hours of the day."

Harry merely nodded. He was assaulted by painful memories of the war; his friends never had the chance to live their lives. He closed his eyes tightly; his scar began to hurt and he slapped one of the strongest mental walls he could conjure.

On his side, Albus Dumbledore blinked at the boy. He was using magic, but what? Whatever it was, it was familiar...and very strong. What was the boy hiding? Who was he? But as soon as the feeling

came, it went away, and when he gazed at James the boy was talking with the flying instructor normally, as if nothing had ever happened. Was he imagining things?

A squawk interrupted the conversations and everyone looked upwards to see a snowy white owl flying up to the head table. Harry glanced at the owl and he smiled in joy. "Hey Hedwig!"

But the owl wasn't showing any signs of slowing down and Harry got up clumsily and barely evaded the claw attack. "Hey! Hedwig!" he cried out indignantly. "What are you doing?!"

The owl flew down on the table and when Harry approached her she took a vicious nip at his good arm. "Ow! Hedwig! I'm sorry I didn't go back last night but-"

He suddenly stopped and blanched.

Poppy was about to panic and check him when he hit his head on the table rather vigorously, muttering a string of curses that left Minerva raising her eyebrows in shock and Remus Lupin and Sirius Black raising their eyebrows because they oddly recognized some of those curses, they belonging to the latter. Very colorful curses, indeed.

James' face was still as white as his owl when he gazed back at the animal. "She's mad at me for going out without her, isn't she?" he asked Hedwig.

The teachers were baffled when the owl hooted in response, as if it understood its master.

The angry hoot made Harry thump his head on the table again. "Fuck. I did it this time. She's going to kill me."

He abruptly got up and thanked them absentmindedly for their hospitality while walking around the table. Albus got up with a serious look. "Are you in some kind of danger, Mister Evans?"

Harry chuckled uneasily. "No...no. Um, Rosmerta is kind of overprotective and scary as hell when she's mad. I think she'll want

an explanation. I better go.” But it wasn’t Rosmerta’s wrath he was worried about; more about the one of Nagini once she got a hold on him.

He looked around, suddenly nervous and self-conscious about having everyone’s gaze on him. “Um, thanks for everything, you know.” He backed away while bowing his thanks and he became serious and once again tense.

Albus’ brow shot up; this boy changed attitudes faster than he could read them! But he was definitively hiding something. “Are you certain everything’s alright, young man?”

Harry occluded his mind further and nodded. “Yes, I’m afraid I can’t stay.”

“But what about our match?” Hooch cried out almost in a whine, making Draco Malfoy jealous that she was paying attention to someone else instead of him and his ‘talents’ for Quidditch.

“Not today, I’m afraid. I really must go, I’m sorry!” He turned around and started to run.

Colin was left stuttering behind him and tried to run after him. “Hey! Please don’t go just like that!!!”

Albus motioned with his head for Sirius to follow the young Gryffindor. Sirius nodded imperceptibly and walked out of the Great Hall, only to run toward the entrance doors of the castle; they were wide open.

He exhaled silently in relief when he spotted Colin on the door step, but no sign of the dark haired boy who curiously resembled him. “Mr. Creevey.”

Colin jumped at the voice of his Defense professor; Sirius Black wasn’t one to mess with. The teacher could be somewhat scary sometimes, even if he was one of the best in the department.

The young blonde had heard somewhere that Sirius Black, in his young age, had been a relentless prankster. But now, ever since the death of those he considered his family, James and Lily Potter, he had changed. And ever drastically so when he had learned that their son hadn't been spared.

Everyone thought that Black had taken the baby's death even harder than his parents', and even Remus Lupin was subdued and tired of having to bear this knowledge. Merlin only knows why they stayed in Hogwarts, where the boy would have winded up if he had had the opportunity to grow up.

"I'm sorry, Professor Black. He was already gone when I opened the doors."

Sirius frowned slightly as Colin went back in, but he stayed silent. Mentally, however... 'How could the boy disappear like that? Even in a dead run, the way from the school to the Forbidden Forest takes a few minutes. We should have been able to see him.'

.....

How right was he, but then again, this Sirius didn't know what James Evans was really capable of. As soon as Harry was outside he got his Firebolt out from his pocket and muttered "Engorgio!" to make it bigger.

He mounted his broom and dashed away in one of his fastest speed when he heard Colin's shouts nearing him from inside the castle. "Sorry." He whispered and let his broom do the job; he was in the middle of the trail toward Hogsmeade in just a few seconds, long gone from the eyesight of the habitants of Hogwarts.

He stopped and reduced his broom's size when he approached the village, not wanting to attract attention with a broom that didn't exist here. He winced as his arm started to sting again; in his mad run he had totally forgotten about it and now he was paying the price.

He hurried it up and didn't bother to salute anyone on his way to The Three Broomsticks. Nobody was really paying attention to him or they were merely sending him evil looks, which Harry considered normal since he had disappeared right when the Death Eaters had been sighted and he was just coming back.

The people's trust was really hard to gain and maintain here, and he almost snorted at the thought of Mad-Eye Moody being less paranoid than them, which wasn't an easy feat.

He tried to make himself as little as possible when he entered the pub, but unfortunately Rosmerta was waiting for him with huge glowering eyes and her hands resting on her hips. "JAMES EVANS!"

Harry froze in mid-step and winced at her loud voice echoing in the tavern. She stalked to him furiously as if to shake the hell out of him and his eyes twitched when she hugged him tightly instead, wailing about how worried she had been. "James! Thank Merlin you're alright! Where were you?! I thought the Death Eaters got to you yesterday!"

Harry patted her back awkwardly and surreptitiously, he tried to dislodge his injured arm out of the death grip.

Rosmerta noticed. "James? Is something wrong?" she backed away and gave him a look over while he took back his arm and massaged it.

"Don't worry about me. Madam Pomfrey tried to heal my arm but I kind of ran away this morning when I remembered that you didn't know where I was. It'll finish healing on its own."

Rosmerta's eyes widened. "Madam Pomfrey? As in the nurse at Hogwarts? What were you doing there at this hour?! It's dangerous to go out, especially when Death Eaters and Dementors roam the lands freely!" she admonished.

The dark haired boy gave her an apologetic glance. "I know. I helped one of the students but got hit as the two Death Eaters apparated away. Fortunately, the young Gryffindor got away with no permanent injuries, just a really good scare, I guess."

She gasped. "You got hit?!"

He nodded absently, remembering about Nagini, who was still waiting in his room. "Yeah, but only with a nasty cutting hex, I'll survive. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm really tired. I haven't slept a lot because of the Skele-Grow potion I had to take."

He ignored the woman's gasp and jumped the stairs two by two, Hedwig following him dutifully; she had finally calmed down.

Harry unlocked the door, braced himself and pushed the door open. Nagini was there, right in front of him, but no angry hiss came out of her.

Harry's eyebrows rose in surprise and apprehension. Was she going to bite him? He closed the door quietly behind him and placed a silencing charm around the room. But Nagini still didn't hiss. That scared him even more than if she had reacted.

The eight feet long snake slithered to him silently and he gulped, but she merely coiled around him and settled around his chest, lifting her head afterward to gaze at him. "I am glad you are alright." Nagini hissed silently, surprising Harry even further.

"Are you not mad at me, Nagini?" he asked calmly, his shock ebbing away to make place for somberness.

"I am, but I also am to blame because I didn't follow you. Your well-being is my prime concern, young master. From now on I will be more careful and stay attached to you by the hip, literally."

Harry chuckled and it came out as a steady hissing sound. "Alright. I'm happy you're so concerned about me, my dear. But aren't you going to be uncomfortable under my cloak and always coiled around me like that?"

Nagini hissed in negative. "I like thiss possition, and I like to sstay warm. It iss you I am concerned about. You will not be able to take your cloak off while in public."

Harry shrugged and patted the scaly head. "I'll manage."

Nagini uncoiled from around him to let him lie down onto his bed. "I will take a nap and then I will help Rossmerta. She desservess it after the sscare I gave her."

Nagini lifted her head from her spot. "Of coursse. But you still owe Hedwig and me one juicy mousse each for going away like thiss without bringing uss with you. She wass really mad at you, the owl."

Harry nodded, deep in thought. "I'll get the mice later. I apologize again, Hedwig," he then said out loud in human language for his first familiar to understand. Hedwig hooted and she was soon sleeping at her spot on the desk.

The boy's eyes closed and soon he was in Morpheus' own, dreaming about Hogwarts and its -alive- inhabitants...especially a certain Werewolf and his dog Animagus friend.

I hope you're not too disappointed that Nagini didn't jump on Harry only to bite him! She realized that Harry is a responsible 'grown man', but since she seems to care about him as her own, she'll stay with him even more often.

You've also had a glimpse of Remus and Sirius!!! Yay! They're more serious and careful around people, though. They'll have doubts and stuff because of James' darker nature, but they will also be guided by Remus' senses.

Next chapter: Albus shows up in The Three Broomsticks. Harry encounters more of Tom's servants in the Forbidden Forest and they're not going to forget about him so soon if they can ever escape out of the spiders' grasp alive. (wink, wink!)

REVIEWS ARE APPRECIATED!!!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos :)

Chapter 7: The voices in the forest

Two days later, Harry was back at his daily routine of taking care of The Three Broomsticks with Rosmerta. His arm still hurt a little because it didn't have the time to heal completely, so he had to be careful when he handled the trays of food.

Hedwig had gone hunting and Nagini was wrapped comfortably around his middle section, hidden from the prying eyes.

“May I have a Butterbeer, young man?”

Harry startled and turned around, almost gaping at the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in person; it wasn't everyday you saw him in the pub, in plain daylight, and in the middle of the week, no less.

“Albus! What a surprise! What brings you here on this fine Wednesday?” Rosmerta asked happily.

The old man winked playfully. “Why, I've come to enjoy a Butterbeer, and perhaps a few of those excellent cookies of yours?”

Rosmerta chuckled and walked away to bring what he had asked, while the old man made himself comfortable on a chair. “Why don't you sit down with me for a few minutes, Mr. Evans?”

Harry bit his lips and hesitated, but when the headmaster gave him the old puppy dog eyes the boy relented and sat down in front of Dumbledore.

A plate of cookies was deposited on the table, as well as a mug of Butterbeer, and Rosmerta lifted an eyebrow playfully. “Well, well! You had an ulterior motive for coming after all! Are you trying to steal my helper?”

Albus laughed and shook his head negatively. "No, not at all! But I do want to talk to him."

Rosmerta looked at James and nodded; James had told her that he had helped one of Albus' students (but withholding some details), and she knew that the headmaster needed some time alone with James. She walked away, leaving her helper and the old man behind, who were on the receiving end of the stares from the customers.

Harry held himself straight and gazed at Albus with a neutral face, waiting for him to start talking.

Albus obliged; he put a vial on the table, straight in front of a wary looking James. "I've had a rabid nurse on my case until I accepted to bring this to you. Mme Pomfrey was certain your arm would still be hurting and she made my Potions Master brew a dozen vials of this healing potion. I don't think poor Severus will hold you in his heart anymore."

Albus chuckled at his little joke and Harry rolled his eyes, muttering darkly under his breath; "has he ever?" Then, he took the vial and drank it in one go, feeling the welcomed effect on his sore arm a few minutes later. He sighed in relief and lifted his arm up and down, gauging if he needed more of this potion.

"Can you thank Madam Pomfrey for me? As well as Mr. Snape? This is greatly appreciated."

Albus looked at him with a twinkle in his eyes, a twinkle that hadn't been shown in a great while. "Why don't you tell them yourself? Poppy is dying to do a check-up on you, Xiomara is dying to have that one-on-one you promised her and you got most of my students and teachers curious about you. Not to mention that you now have an admirer in one Colin Creevey. Never has anyone had that kind of influence on them like this. You know you are welcome at anytime, right?"

The boy in front of him sighed. The headmaster could tell that he was torn in different directions, and he used his Legilimens ability at its lowest power just to try to see why the boy was so uncertain about

going to Hogwarts. The old man's eyebrows shot up when he encountered a –very- strong mental barrier.

‘The boy knows Occlumency?! Or is this just a coincidence and purely unintentional?’ One thing was for sure: he didn't want to have the boy out of his sight. If there was one thing Albus Dumbledore hated, it was being surprised.

“I'll think about it.”

Albus snapped out of his reverie at the boy's answer, and he nodded absentmindedly and munched on a cookie. James didn't show any signs of knowing that he had tried to look into the boy's mind, so Albus based his discovery on being a pure coincidence. He would probably be able to look into James' mind another day, or have Severus do it.

The black haired teen got up, a silent way to tell Albus that he had a job to do and that this conversation was over. To others this would have looked discourteous, but Albus merely got up, paid Rosmerta's due and turned around.

“Remember, you are most welcome at the school.” With those last parting words, the old headmaster exited the pub.

Harry went back to his business, deftly evading Rosmerta's questioning gaze and his displeasure at knowing that Albus was as cunning here as in his world, as well as even more audacious; he had felt the old man surreptitiously try to weave himself into his mind.

Old fool.

He loved the headmaster to death, no mistakes about that, but Dumbledore had tried so many times to use him that he was no longer an enthusiastic follower of Albus and his Order. He was fighting for –his own- cause now; he was willing to fight Voldemort and his Death Eaters only for his personal gratification, and not for anyone else's.

“So, what did he want?” Rosmerta put a hand on his shoulder and gave him a curious look.

Harry shrugged. “He wanted to know if I ever intended to go back to Hogwarts. I’m not sure; I do have a job here.”

Rosmerta shook her head. “You should accept his invitation and be with people your age. It would do you some good. You’re too serious for a kid.”

James sighed and told her he wanted to take a small break, and he stopped momentarily at the half-opened door to glance back at her. “You know, I have a reason to be like I am now. And I haven’t been a kid in a long time.”

He walked out of the pub, leaving Rosmerta behind to ponder on what he just said. Once he was outside, he inhaled the fresh winter air blissfully. Today really was a beautiful day.

“Hedwig!” he called out, ignoring the whispers and the stares around him as he smiled at his approaching familiar and petted her softly once she landed on the outstretched arm. “Let’s take a walk, shall we?” he cooed gently.

He exited the village and walked a little along a trail beside the Forbidden Forest, but it didn’t lead directly to the castle. “Nagini, you can come out now. There aren’t any humans following us.”

Harry felt the snake slither up his arm and poke her face out of his sleeve. “It’s so cold outside. I wish I could roam around on the ground,” she stated longingly.

Harry smiled at her and tapped her head affectionately. “We’re in December, love. Spring isn’t up for another five or six months. You will have to be patient,” he replied.

After a while he turned around to go back to Hogsmeade, but he stopped and narrowed his eyes when he heard some shuffling and people talking in the forest. “Hedwig, fly away. Nagini, hide.”

Harry put his hood on and he disappeared swiftly in the forest. He walked in the Forbidden Forest silently and furtively until the sounds became clear; Harry hid quickly behind a bushy area as he spotted four Death Eaters in the middle of a conversation. 'I was right; Centaurs can't possibly make the kind of noises they make wherever they go.'

They were talking about another imminent attack on Hogwarts and Harry smirked when he heard them mention that Malfoy and Dolohov were still recuperating from the wounds he gave them from the Lacero. The Dark Lord also sounded quite furious about that, too.

He decided to play with them a little and teach them a lesson about showing up in the middle of the day just to play an attack on –his– home. He cast a simple Notice-Me-Not spell on himself and got up without disturbing the leaves.

"Rictusempra!" he suddenly shouted at one of the masked men.

They startled and barely evaded the spell. The Notice-Me-Not spell vanished and the Death Eaters growled dangerously at the cloaked person. "Who the hell are you and how dare you attack us!?!"

Under his hood, Harry hid a grin and he bolted in a dead run, looking back to see if they were following him; they were and that was exactly what he wanted. 'Bloody idiots! They don't know this forest like I do.'

Deeper and deeper he brought them, and nearer to Hogwarts at the same occasion; he didn't have a choice. The one he was seeking out lived near Hogwarts. He arrived at his destination soon enough and the Death Eaters weren't too far behind.

'They're so slow!' Harry thought groggily, but he used this time to call out for one of the forest's inhabitant. "Aragog! I know you're here! Show yourself!"

Seconds later he was surrounded by hundreds of baby spiders and the giant Acromantula Aragog, Hagrid's pet since 1942, if he recalled

correctly. But even better, another giant spider showed up beside Aragog and looked equally pissed.

“Good! Even Mosag is here.” Harry muttered silently to himself.

Mosag was the mate of Aragog, a female Acromantula that lived near Hogwarts, also in the Forbidden Forest.

“Aragog, Mosag! Hear me out! I have a deal to make with you!”

Aragog advanced menacingly toward him but Harry didn’t back away and stood his ground. “Human! How is it you know our names and how dare you show yourself to us so blatantly! I should give you to our babies for food!”

Harry smirked again. “I alone wouldn’t do a very good meal for your numerous children. Let’s make a deal: let me go. But many Death Eaters are following me and they would do a nice meal, don’t you think? Especially since I’ve heard them talking about an attack on Hogwarts. Hagrid would be in danger. You wouldn’t want that for Hagrid, wouldn’t you?” Harry knew he had hit a weak spot of Aragog; the giant spider loved Hagrid very much.

The sound of the approaching Death Eaters was enough proof for Aragog and he quickly nodded his assent. “Very well. My children will not harm you. But know this: if you ever come back I will not show such mercy and you will not be spared.”

The boy nodded. “Of course.” He didn’t expect any less from the Acromantula, after all.

The Death Eaters finally arrived, panting like mad and looking around wildly. “YOU!” they shouted angrily in unison.

Harry smirked and stepped back, and they finally noticed the spiders surrounding them. Harry could tell they were frightened even with the mask they were wearing. “My dear Death Eaters, I present to you the Acromantula Aragog, his mate Mosag and their children. This will teach you to follow an old lunatic of a master!”

The Death Eaters stuttered in shock and anger at his guts. "How dare you talk about the Dark Lord this way?! Who are you?!"

The baby spiders started to get impatient and advanced on the dark servants. Harry simply laughed while they brandished their wand. "You can ask old Malfoy and Dolohov! Tell them the Boy-Who-Lived sends his regards! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

He turned around and ran away unscathed while screams erupted from behind him, along with the shouts of hexes and curses. Harry was sure that some of them would be able to escape, but if the spiders could at least kill one or two, it was one or two Death Eaters less in this world.

He stopped when he exited the forest, only to gaze at Hogwarts. Harry sighed loudly and raked a hand through his dark mass of hair. "Just great," he muttered to himself, and looked around to see if anyone had seen him.

There were some students outside, but they looked too busy to even notice him; they were in the middle of a snowball fight, Ravenclaws versus Hufflepuff. Some younger Gryffindors had also joined the group of seemingly first and second years.

"They're so young and they don't seem to care that danger is always lurking around. What if one of those Death Eaters had captured or even injured one of them?" Harry asked himself.

They truly needed to be protected. Harry didn't want to badmouth the prowess of the Order of the Phoenix, and the talents of Dumbledore, Remus, Sirius or any other adult in the school, but they truly didn't know how fucked up things were. Harry knew. Hell, he had even been front row, center seat in this shit back in his world.

He heard some shouts overlapping the youngsters' yells and gazed in the direction of the Quidditch pitch where he was sure some team was practicing for a future match. Harry sighed again and started to walk back to Hogsmeade. His decision was made. "I guess Hooch will be happy," he said amusedly.

He was walking back when the leaves rustled again, but this time near the edge of the Forest. Harry narrowed his eyes and gripped his wand from his wand holster.

Thump. Thump.

He blinked calmly and relaxed, putting away his wand. 'That's no Death Eater, from the sound of it. So it can only be one thing.'

"Why don't you stop following me and make yourself known, Centaur?" Harry called out evenly and confidently.

There was sudden silence, and then, as the dark haired boy predicted, a Centaur slowly came out of the Forest, eyeing him with slight distrust and a lot of intrigue. Harry's eyes widened. "Firenze?"

The Centaur backed away slightly and narrowed his eyes. "You know of me, human? Then it would only be fair if I could see your face."

Harry let his hood down and Firenze lifted an eyebrow. The boy was looking at him as if he knew him, and with total trust, which Firenze thought a little disconcerting.

"I'm James Evans. Did you want something, Firenze? To follow a human like that and go out of the Forbidden Forest, I'm impressed. You shouldn't tell Bane about this, though. Merlin knows how much he despises our kind, as he calls us."

Firenze's eyebrows shot up in surprise when the boy talked to him as if talking with a friend. "How do you know of me, James Evans, when I do not know of you? How is it you know of Bane and his hating tendencies?" the disturbed Centaur asked with renewed curiosity.

The boy's aura reeked of confidence and courage, but something darker, also.

The dark haired boy chuckled sadly. "You don't need to worry about that. I'm not an enemy and that's all you need to know. Why were you

following me? Let me guess: Mars somehow shone on me or something?"

Firenze opened his mouth, closed it, and opened it again. It wasn't everyday you could catch a Centaur unguarded and render him speechless. "Well yes, as a matter of fact! But- Forget about this! You know, if it hadn't been for you intervening during the Death Eaters' meeting I would have thought you to be an enemy and you would have been killed on the spot! I was about to stop them myself for even entering the Forbidden Forest and invading our territory! You've been lucky with Aragog, also! It's not everyday he lets a human escape! You puzzle me."

James put his hood back on and turned his back on Firenze. "Yeah well, I'm a puzzle for most of the people I know. You should go back to your home, Firenze, before Bane comes to get you and calls you a traitor for even talking to me. And don't worry about Hogwarts; I intend to protect it even if it's the last thing I do. It's my home after all." With that, the boy walked away, leaving a pensive Centaur behind.

"Yes, what a riddle you are, James Evans. I foresee that this will not be the last time I hear of you, whoever you are. The deep aura of mystery you carry shall one day be deciphered. Time is changing, a revolution is coming."

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"You're back, finally! I was beginning to grow worried!" Rosmerta was once again all around him.

James sighed and backed away from her only when her prying fingers neared his middle section where Nagini was resting. "I'm fine Rosmerta. I needed to take some fresh air to clear my thoughts. Do you mind if I take a day off tomorrow? I've accepted to accept the headmaster's invitation."

The woman squealed happily. "Good for you!!! But now I'll miss you and your helping hand..."

James chuckled and shook his head. "I don't have any intention of stopping this job to live there. It's just a matter of rearranging my schedule. I could work maybe starting at five or six when the pub is starting to become packed and sleep here afterwards in the bedroom you allowed me to stay in."

Rosmerta furrowed her brow. "The working at five idea I don't mind, but it's the thought of you traveling alone back and forth between the village and the school that I don't like."

James rolled his eyes as if not caring about this at all. "Nothing has ever happened to me and I even helped one of the students there. I'm not helpless, Rosmerta."

The woman opened her mouth to protest but shut it with the look the boy gave her that left no place for arguments.

"Oh, okay," she finally relented, "but if something happens to you and if your safety is compromised this plan of yours will have to change. Is this clear, young man?" she asked sternly, hands on her hips.

Harry thought it funny and he snorted, eyes rolling heavenward. "Yes, mother."

He laughed and ran up the stairs as an empty mug was thrown in his direction and collided where he once stood.

"I'll get you for this, James Evans!" Rosmerta joked merrily.

Another chapter done! Just so you all know, Mosag truly exists in the Potter-verse and she really is Aragog's mate. (How did you think that a male spider could have 'children'???)

Next chapter: Harry makes his entrance in Hogwarts! Slytherins are against him (no change there) and our hero accepts to follow some of the classes as a guest. Time for Care of magical Creatures!

PLEASE REVIEW! THANX!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos ;)

Chapter 8: Constant Vigilance!

“Man, I think Trelawney is becoming crazier every year!” Ronald Weasley exclaimed while rolling his eyes upward.

Neville was muttering incoherently beside him and nodding to Ron’s statement. “That was so weird! She just froze in front of your tea cup and bawled that ‘the one with the Unforgivable eyes’ would be coming soon! I mean, how crazy is that?!”

They sat at Gryffindor table, joining Dean and Seamus who had already started to eat. Hermione walked up to them and sat on Ron’s lap, which made a couple of Gryffindor boys whistle and wiggle their eyebrows at Ron. The redhead chuckled a couple of muggle french fries at them playfully while the Ravenclaw girl scoffed.

“Oh honestly, you’re all so immature!” Hermione rolled her eyes at their behavior and stole a couple of fries from Ron’s plate. “And anyway, why are you still taking classes with that crazy old woman? I’ve never heard of her as being a true Seer, let alone announce a true Prophecy. You want to be an Auror, Ron, so why didn’t you take another more useful subject?” she chastised him.

Ron shrugged and Seamus answered for his friend. “Because, oh great intellectual Hermione, we Gryffindors like to have it the easiest way, unlike you Ravenclaws who prefer to boss like crazy and render yourselves almost sick by studying too hard.”

The Gryffindors around them laughed and Hermione pouted at Seamus. “It’s not true. And at least my grades are better than yours!” she retaliated cleverly, but the thought didn’t hinder Seamus in the least.

“Of course they are! You’re a Ravenclaw and you make it your job to be more intelligent than anyone else here. But we’re Gryffindors and courage is our area of expertise!”

“Ah yes, the famous Gryffindor courage! Personally, I think it’s all rubbish. Foolishness and rash behavior will be the death of you,” a voice drawled from behind them.

The Gryffindors plus Hermione turned around to look at a smirking Draco Malfoy, Slytherin Prefect seventh year.

Ron sneered at him and Hermione had to coax him to stay seated. “What do you bloody want now, Malfoy?” the name was spat from Ron’s mouth as if it was the Ebola virus itself.

Malfoy tutted mockingly. “I was merely saying the truth, Weasley.”

Crabbe and Goyle laughed stupidly beside him.

Hermione had more and more trouble restraining Ron so Dean, who sat beside Ron, held down the redhead’s arm so he couldn’t get up and start a damn fight right in front of the teachers.

But Seamus couldn’t help but retaliate in Ron’s place. “Yes well, we all know you bloody Slytherins are all the same: evil to the core! How’s your master, Malfoy? Did he make you grovel and kiss his boots again?” Seamus taunted with a malicious smile.

Malfoy saw red and barely controlled himself while the other Gryffindors, and even the –mudblood-, laughed in his face.

Ron managed to stop his laughter, though his eyes betrayed what he thought. “Yeah Malfoy! What kind of life is that? You think you’re all superior and everything, but hell! I would pay a fortune just to see you on your knees and kissing His shoes as if you were the dirtiest lowlife on Earth!”

Malfoy tensed and Crabbe and Goyle had their wand out in a second, ready to hex them. The Gryffindors all reacted and brandished their own wand, getting up to face the Slytherins in front of them, as well as those who were getting up behind the blonde Prefect.

The teachers were frowning and were immediately up as the seventh years got their wand, but they weren't fast enough as Pansy Parkinson yelled the first hex. "FURNUNCULUS!"

Ron, who hadn't seen the Slytherin girl raise her wand, gasped when the hex hurled toward him. His voice caught in his throat the moment he tried to think about a shielding spell, the surprise of being attacked blocking his ability to move properly.

"PROTEGO! OBBLITERO!"

The hex first stopped in front of Ron, and then vanished with the cancellation charm.

They all turned their gazes toward the entrance of the Great Hall, where James Evans stood, wand poised at the ready and one eyebrow raised toward them. He soon lowered his wand and holstered it.

"My my, what a welcome committee. Do you always let your students fight like this where people could get hurt or is it only a game for them, Headmaster?" James asked neutrally, hiding his dislike of Draco Malfoy.

Albus gave him a thankful but serious gaze and turned toward the guilty looking students. "I assure you this behavior usually isn't acceptable at any time of the day, Mr. Evans." His eyes held no twinkle at all while he glanced at each and every one of the culprits, who reddened in embarrassment under the grave expression of the Headmaster.

"I am ashamed of your actions, especially the seventh years. You should know better! Hasn't this animosity lasted long enough? We have to be united if we want to survive the impending war that will befall upon us sooner or later, and you are all caught in House rivalries! A hundred points from both Gryffindor and Slytherin for your actions. I hope this will make you think a little before acting so brashly."

Many voices protested at the unfairness of this but Dumbledore held his ground firmly. Severus Snape glared at the young members of his House and they immediately shut up, but not without glaring one last time at the Gryffindors, and then at the newcomer who had stopped the hex from reaching its path.

Minerva McGonagall held an expression of pure disappointment and that made the Gryffindors hold their comments.

The atmosphere was tense between the students and teachers, but everyone seemed to relax when Dumbledore smiled slightly and beckoned James to sit beside him.

As Harry walked beside Ron, trying not to look at the redhead at all, a hand closed lightly on his arm. Ron gave him a grateful glance, choosing to avert looking straight at him.

“Thanks. For stopping the hex, I mean.” It was short and mumbled, but a show of gratitude nonetheless, so the dark haired boy nodded at his ‘friend’ and continued his trek towards the Head table, blatantly ignoring the angry growling coming from the Slytherin table.

He said a curt hello to Colin Creevey, who appeared very happy to see him.

Sitting down on the offered chair, Harry almost chuckled at Poppy Pomfrey who kept fidgeting on her chair right beside him; it looked as if she was trying to keep her mouth shut but Harry knew what she desperately wanted to do.

He sighed silently and extended his previously injured arm right in front of her without looking at the nurse. He heard her squeal and she hurriedly took the bandage off to see in what condition his left arm was.

While the nurse happily prodded his arm, he took a bite out of the lunch that appeared in front of him. “So, you choose to accept my proposition?” Albus asked with the infernal twinkle in his blue eyes.

Harry sighed and put his fork down. "Partly. I won't be sleeping here, for most of the time anyway. I'm keeping my work at The Three Broomsticks; Rosmerta needs all the help she can get. I'll still be sleeping there." Harry replied calmly.

Albus opened his mouth but Harry interrupted before the subject was brought up again. "I know, this arrangement will make me travel between Hogwarts and Hogsmeade a lot and when it's dark outside, but it's this or nothing. I've already talked about it with Rosmerta anyway and if anything –should- happen then I'll reconsider."

His decision was final and Albus couldn't contradict him with the concise tone of voice he used.

"All right then," he relented, "but do tell me if you ever change your mind," the old man said amiably, but still a little disgruntled because he couldn't get the boy to do as he wished.

Harry mentally rolled his eyes at the old man. 'Yeah, stay here so you can spy on me and manipulate me like a puppet? I'm not a toy anymore.' Harry thought darkly.

He blinked to reality when his arm was given back to him; he had forgotten about the nurse's prodding. Madam Pomfrey gave him a satisfied smile. "Your arm is almost as good as new Mr. Evans! You took the potion I asked Albus to give you, I see!"

James nodded and glanced toward the Potions Master, who had opted to ignore the world around him with his usual scowl etched on his face.

"Yes, I thank you for those; they helped a lot to finish the healing process. I would like to thank you also, Mr. Snape, for brewing these excellent potions."

It was Snape's turn to blink and he couldn't help but nod in Harry's direction after receiving such praise for his potions.

Xiomara Hooch leaned her head in her hand and looked at him playfully. "So, it's the return of Sirius' illegitimate child! Did you come here for any particular reason or just to stop an ongoing fight between our students?" She laughed when James blinked. 'Sirius' illegitimate child?'

The other teachers chuckled and Sirius looked at the flying instructor weirdly. "My illegitimate child? What are you talking about Xiomara?"

Remus, the ever so clever one, raised an eyebrow at his friend but they could still hear the light humoring tone in his voice. "Come on, Sirius. The boy does resemble you greatly. It's only a joke between teachers."

The dog animagus merely hummed to acknowledge Remus' statement. "Actually, you do look like me, but it's your name I find intriguing." Sirius addressed James, who lifted an eyebrow.

Harry's heart started to beat faster but he willed himself to keep calm. "Oh? What about my name?"

Sirius looked at him suspiciously. "Are you related, by any way, to one Lily Evans?"

Harry's heart jumped but he forced himself to shake his head negatively and look oblivious, while the atmosphere at the table got sadder and graver. "No, I'm sorry. I never really knew my parents anyway, but a dear friend once told me that they had both been great wizards."

Sirius' head bent down and he sighed. "Oh."

Remus felt his friend's sadness and looked at the boy more closely. 'His smell...his smell is somewhat...familiar...and why is his heart beating so strongly? Is he hiding something from us?'

The Werewolf kept James under a tight look, so the boy fidgeted and, sensing that he was being spied upon, he adorned a mask of indifference.

Albus' head shot up as he tried not to look at the dark haired boy. 'I felt it again, I'm sure of it! He is using magic, but what?' he gave the boy a calculating look but was unable to get any response from him.

Harry was starting to get irritated by all the looks he was receiving. 'I get an invitation but they can't keep themselves from trying to spy on me! The nerve!'

He closed his eyes and spoke up, his voice like steel and merciless. "Please stop staring. I do not appreciate it one bit."

The teachers blinked and had the decency to blush and look elsewhere. Albus apologized. "We're sorry. It's not everyday we invite someone over and we have the tendency to become overly suspicious."

Harry narrowed his eyes at him and got up; the teachers followed the movement closely and gasped silently as the boy roughly pulled his sleeve up, showing his left arm to them and to the few students who were looking at the front.

"You saw last day but I will show you again, just for the sake of it! My arm is unmarked! Don't get any ideas about me. I am –not- and –never- will be a follower of Voldemort!" he sneered, and there were many gasps and cries of shock as he so openly mentioned the Dark Lord's name.

The teachers also gasped, save a few ones, but their eyes clearly widened at the boy's guts. "Aren't you afraid of saying the Lord's name, child?" Albus asked calmly. His old eyes widened even more as the boy started to laugh loudly at him.

"What?! –chortle- Me, afraid of saying Voldemort's name?! Ha! Ha! Ha!" He continued to laugh as even the students gasped and looked at him with awe and a little bit of fear. He wasn't afraid of saying the Dark Lord's name!

He suddenly stopped laughing, looking at Albus straight in the eyes with a dark look. "Fear of the name only increases the fear of the thing itself. I am not afraid."

He pulled his sleeve down and looked at Albus with a smirk; he had the Headmaster completely baffled. "Now, you wanted me to stay here, so what can I do during the day?"

Albus stroked his beard, trying to regain his bearing. "Well, would you like to attend some of the classes? Just to see what you think of them, of course. And you told me that you hadn't attended the seventh year back at your old school. Maybe you could learn new things?"

Harry held himself from scoffing and shrugged in indifference instead. "I don't mind. Which group of persons should I go with?"

Albus' decision was rapidly taken when he saw the looks of animosity coming from the Slytherins, and most particularly from Draco Malfoy. "You can stay with the Gryffindors for the moment; Mr. Creevey seemed much attached to you already and you also got the attention of Mr. Weasley. Classes are starting soon, you should follow them."

He turned toward Minerva with a curious look. "Say, my dear, which class does the Gryffindor seventh year have this afternoon?"

The Transfiguration teacher and Head of House of Gryffindor produced a parchment and looked it over. "I do believe they have Care of Magical Creatures with professor Manx."

Albus got up and lightly pushed James in the direction of the Gryffindor table, where they were all waiting for him. He let out the ghost of a smile when they all flocked around him to greet him more properly.

"Hey, thanks again for earlier! My name's Ronald Weasley but my friends all call me Ron. This is my girlfriend Hermione Granger, she's in Ravenclaw."

James stared at Hermione for a second, making her fidget, but he averted his gaze when Seamus, Dean and Neville also said their

hellos, as well as Ginny Weasley and some of the younger Lions, Colin and his gulping brother included.

Harry kept his neutral expression on, so it probably frightened some of them. "It was no problem, but you should be more careful next time," the dark haired boy answered Ron. "Constant Vigilance I have been taught."

Albus, who was previously smiling, now narrowed his eyes at the boy. This phrase sounded –very- familiar, but he kept his mouth shut. Sirius saw the look and called Albus on it as soon as the teacher got up to get to their classrooms in time. The old headmaster took a step away from them and Sirius and Remus followed him.

"Boys, I have a feeling about that young man. He is more and knows more than he lets on, I am sure of it, which is why I have invited him here. I want you to check on him sometimes, when time permits it."

The two Marauders nodded seriously and cast one last look at James as he walked away, surrounded by the seventh years. Remus was lost in his thoughts so Sirius elbowed him. "Something wrong, Remus?"

The Werewolf shook his head negatively but Sirius threw him a 'You're-a-bad-liar' look. Remus sighed. "It's just...He unsettles me."

The cursed one ran a hand through his hair nervously while the headmaster and Sirius blinked, waiting for a more profound explanation.

"I sense nervousness in him, and yet seconds later he is able to hide it. I'm with Albus on this one; we have to keep an eye on him. But on the other side, I feel as though I can trust him with all I have."

Sirius interrupted him with a rude scoff and he crossed his arm on his chest. "Not a lot of people like that are left, Remus. Don't trust the boy with only your instincts, it could cost you your life and it would destroy

me, you know it," the concealed animagus finished more quietly, making Remus' eyes sadden.

The Werewolf cast his look on the floor and yet, he couldn't help but add one more thing. "It's not only instinct, Sirius. I know I shouldn't be so trusting; I know the boy's aura is abnormally dark for his age and that he acts as if he was hiding something very important from us, and yet...And yet, his smell is oddly familiar, if tainted a little. It's his smell, Sirius, nothing else makes me trust him except for his smell."

With that, Remus left two unsettled man behind, staring at his retreating back. Sirius cast Albus at glance and ran after his companion with haste; he still had a class to teach.

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With their cloaks tightly wrapped around them, the seventh years Gryffindors and Slytherins walked outside and towards a large hut near the Forbidden Forest. The Slytherins paid no heed to it but the Gryffindors saw James' obvious interest in it.

Ron approached him and pointed towards it. "That's the groundskeeper's hut. His name is Hagrid and he's a half-giant. We all love him and he favors us out of all the other houses and we wanted him to be our Care of Magical Creatures' teacher, but it wasn't meant to be with all the ministry officials banning those who are considered dark creatures. Dumbledore had his say in this and made sure that Hagrid could stay and that he wasn't a follower of 'You-Know-Who'."

James nodded. "And where is he? I didn't see him at lunch."

Ron shrugged and took his place in the makeshift outdoor classroom since they couldn't just sit in the snow. Seamus answered him while Manx wasn't looking. "We don't really know where he is right now. He should come back soon, though. Every time we asked him, Dumbledore said that Hagrid was running errands for him."

Professor Manx barked at the class to shut up while he counted the students over. Harry took this opportunity to think this over. 'Hm, Hagrid's probably in a mission for the Order. But if dark creatures are

being severely monitored, why is Remus allowed to stay inside and be Sirius' assistant? Doesn't the minister know that he's a Werewolf?'

After thinking this over, it was obvious that no one knew of this piece of information. He didn't think that the Gryffindors or anyone else from the student body knew either because the Slytherins would have acted on this already. He wondered if Hermione knew, but then strongly doubted it. This Hermione probably didn't know Remus as well as he did and anyway, he wasn't there to pry into things here. The Golden Trio didn't exist here.

Manx, a snappish looking man in his mid-thirties, gazed at him suddenly. "You there, you must be James Evans, yes? Headmaster Dumbledore told me you were going to attend some classes as a guest. Do try to stay quiet and follow the group, then."

Harry lifted an eyebrow at the teacher who was kind of provoking him already when he had done nothing wrong.

The Gryffindors beside him bristled while the Slytherins snickered. 'Some things will never change, I see,' Harry deadpanned mentally.

"Follow me, class. Today we're going into the small clearing. Stay grouped and don't lag behind," Manx called out loudly.

While they marched to the clearing, Ron and his friends fell into steps beside James. "We don't really like Manx and he doesn't really like us. I think you better be careful because since you're hanging with us he'll try to intimidate or provoke you. Humiliation is his forte when he sets his heart to it. I don't know what kind of animal we'll see today, so don't try to make yourself be noticed too much. Just an advice, mate." Ron looked at him apprehensively when James didn't look deterred in the least.

"Okay class! Now stay behind me everyone, because the creature we'll see can be very dangerous!" the teacher said with accent, trying to scare the students. The Slytherins hurriedly went behind Manx whilst the Gryffindors merely took a few steps backward.

Harry was sure he heard Neville whimper somewhere behind him; such a familiar sound.

Out of nowhere, a four legged creature appeared, squawking angrily at the teacher and his students. Harry almost had to put his fist in his mouth to stop from crying out in surprise. 'BUCKBEAK?!'

Manx took a few steps toward the beast and bowed rather quickly with a look of distaste. The beast bowed back as stiffly and nearly bit one of Manx's fingers off when he tried to pet it, to Harry's enjoyment.

"Like I said, this creature is called a Hippogriff and is most dangerous, since it's one of Hagrid's pets. It scarcely lets people approach it so we'll stay away to study it."

Harry almost laughed at the Know-It-All tone of voice Manx used. This was Buckbeak and the idiot thought that it was dangerous?! For him maybe, but not for Harry. The teacher kept insulting the proud creature by calling it as if it was a thing, a dark beast, so it was a wonder how he was still alive right now.

Harry scoffed silently and let the man teach his class; he had already had this lesson in his third year. An early lesson it seemed, but he had seen more dangerous things.

"Now, as you can see, the Hippogriff has the body of a lion and the front is of an eagle's. They are very short tempered and this one is even more since the half-giant is away," Manx finished with a disgusted tone, which made Buckbeak squawk and Harry narrow his eyes.

As if it wanted to prove the man wrong, Buckbeak advanced toward the students, who immediately backed away and cried out in fright. Ron was awed by the creature and walked toward it with a rather shaky extended hand.

"Mr. Weasley! Back away this instant! You cannot touch the thing just like that!"

Ron snapped out of it, only too see Buckbeak squawk angrily and gallop toward the teacher. Apparently, Manx had insulted it one time too many.

Harry checked on Ron swiftly and then cursed the teacher's stupidity. He ran in front of Manx and the frightened Slytherins and Gryffindors with his arms spread out and he bowed low.

"Foolish boy!" Manx exclaimed in shock but he gaped as the Hippogriff slowed to a stop in front of James, seemingly curious about him who showed so much respect to his kind. He squawked curiously and neared the boy, extending his head to sniff the human.

But Buckbeak became agitated when his beak came by Harry's stomach. Harry smiled, his head still down, as well as his eyes. "Hello Buckbeak. It's nice to see you. Don't worry about the snake; she's with me," he whispered lowly so no one else could hear and omitted to say 'nice to see you –again-'.

Buckbeak squawked and lifted his head quickly, as if surprised, and looked at the human more closely. Harry smiled secretly and his eyes momentarily changed color...and shape. The black slits of his eyes were oddly familiar for Buckbeak, who now didn't see the boy as a threat any more.

The Hippogriff bowed his head back in respect to everyone's surprise, except Harry's who merely walked toward it and petted the creature's collar as if it was a natural thing to do.

"How? What? When?" Manx was just short of short of words and looking rather humiliated to be outwitted by a mere boy.

"Me and Hippogriffs kind of have a story together. I think you've insulted it, Professor Manx," James spoke up to the now displeased teacher.

"I insulted it?! When?!"

James gazed at Buckbeak who kept offering his head to pet. "A Hippogriff is not a thing or a dark creature as you think it is. It's a very proud creature and very loyal once you have it as a friend. Buckbeak here has reacted to your lack of respect, that's all," James explained calmly while Manx silently fumed.

Ron lifted an eyebrow curiously, still in awe of the creature and of James' obvious audacity. "Buckbeak?"

Harry held his breath and mentally banged his head on a tree, cursing at himself. 'Ahh! Harry, you bloody idiot! How could I let this slip?'

Externally, he shrugged it off. "The Hippogriff's name? He can't be always called a creature or it, can it?" The others accepted his offered explanation, to Harry's great relief.

Manx was so fuming that he cut the lesson short of thirty minutes and let the students go away. The man himself retreated back to the castle with haste, leaving Harry alone with Buckbeak.

But appearances were deceiving, because several Gryffindors were hiding behind nearby trees, as well as a couple of Slytherins on the other side of the clearing. Both groups had very different reasons of spying on Dumbledore's guest, though.

Harry, with his developed senses of knowing when he was being watched, gratitude of being stalked by Snape in the corridors at night, knew that several students had stayed behind.

He opted to let them spy all they wanted, he didn't care in the least...for now. "Ah Buckbeak, it's a crazy world we live in."

The Hippogriff gave a cry as if it was thinking the same thing and lowered its head, looking at him with his big, intelligent eyes. Harry quickly understood and, without minding the muffled gasps he heard behind the trees, he gave himself a boost and hopped on Buckbeak's back.

The creature flapped his powerful wings and, after a small canter, soared through the air and was soon flying above the castle.

“Did you see that?!” Seamus said with awe and excitement as he jumped up and down. “I can’t believe he mounted that Hippogriff!”

The group walked away from the tree and into the clearing. Ron still had his mouth opened. “Wait ‘till I tell Hermione!”

Neville was completely silent and trying to see if James was going to come back any time soon; his mouth was wide opened.

“That was bloody amazing! I wish he could’ve done that in class! That would have shut Manx up completely!” Dean exclaimed in astonishment.

Another rustle of leaves made the boys’ heads turn toward the other end of the clearing, where a sneering Draco Malfoy, with his two goons Crabbe and Goyle, came out from behind some trees. “That guy’s nothing more than trouble and a show off! I hope he’ll get hurt by that –monster-!” the blonde derided.

Ron was quickly changing colors. “Malfoy you snob! Get away from here! Nobody asked your opinion! I personally think you’re jealous of James because he gets more attention than you!”

The Irish boy also gave his two cents; Seamus was mad and held his hands in tight fists. “Yeah! Shut up, Malfoy! Nobody needs to hear the thoughts of a junior Death Eater!”

They all raised their wands to attack, until Neville interrupted their verbal fight with a voice full of unease. “Uh, guys, as much as I would like to see you trash the Slytherins, well, the sun has set and if we’re late for supper the teachers will have our hides. You know we’re not supposed to be outside after dark!”

Malfoy sneered but quickly put his wand into his pocket. He wasn’t afraid of what Snape would do to him, but more of the annoying

Gryffindor Head-of-House. "It's not over yet, Weasley! You can be sure of that!"

With that, Malfoy walked away with his two bodyguards in tow. They were walking pretty quickly; Slytherins were indeed a bunch of cowards.

Ron scoffed and put his wand away as he thought about what Snape would do to them if they were caught outside, and he shuddered at the thought of another detention with Filch. Blegh!

"Come on, guys. We should get back to Hogwarts. Hermione's gonna kill me."

They started to trek back to the school but Dean turned around and looked in the sky; the Hippogriff was nowhere to be seen and it worried him. "Hey guys? I don't see James and the Hippogriff anywhere! Do you think he's all right?"

Ron looked up and shrugged. He was starting to freeze outside and right now his stomach was telling him to hurry his ass into the Great Hall for a nice meal. "I'm sure he is. That creature seems to have a soft spot for him so I think he'll be alright. Maybe he's gone back to Hogsmeade, who knows? We all heard him say that he was going to sleep there even though he was a guest here."

They all nodded at Ron's obvious reasoning and hurried back into Hogwarts.

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Harry heard the villagers cry out in shock when Buckbeak landed right in front of The Three Broomsticks. He paid them no mind and, with one last pat, bid the creature a good night.

He sighed when he was assaulted by the comforting heat of the pub and smiled slightly to Rosmerta, who approached him with a grin of her own. "So James, how was your day?"

The dark haired boy shrugged. "Fairly good. I made some friends, mostly from Gryffindor, though. The others were rather reluctant to talk to me or even get near me."

Rosmerta laughed out loud, gaining the attention of several costumers; their attention quickly went back to their plates, though, when they saw him. Harry was thankful for that.

"It's no wonder, James! Sorry to say this but you -do- look kind of dark in appearance and behavior." She received no answer for that statement and it unnerved her, if only slightly. "Well anyway, I need your help. You should go to your room and change clothes; you're all wet! Have you spent the entire afternoon outside?"

James nodded. "Yeah, for Care of Magical Creatures. Since I'm a guest I can attend some of the classes there to have an idea of what they're like. They were studying Hippogriffs today."

Rosmerta whistled and lifted an eyebrow. "Hippogriffs, eh? Dangerous creatures they are! Did you have any trouble coming back after the class?"

Harry shrugged and started to walk up the stairs. "Not really. Rode one to come back here."

Rosmerta gave him a weird look. "Rode one what?"

Harry was almost out of earshot when he smirked and answered her. "A Hippogriff, of course!"

Several costumers dropped their utensils, which clattered on the floor loudly, while Rosmerta was left behind with her mouth wide opened. "JAMES EVANS! YOU'RE NOT SERIOUS, AREN'T YOU?!" She screeched in alarm, but she received no answer; James had already reached his room and put up a silencing charm.

Harry sighed and took his cloak off. Nagini hissed happily and coiled on the bed. "I'm happy to finally be in bed! All the flying made me queasssy!"

Nagini looked at him as he chuckled. "I'm sssorry, dear. I kind of forgot how much snakes dislike not being on the ground. I haven't flown in ages. That remindss me: ass sssoon ass Madam Pomfrey givess me a clean bill of health, I will assk Hooch if sshe would like to have that little one-on-one I owe her." Harry hissed back while he gave Hedwig some owl treats.

He swore Nagini was making a face at him. "You'll tell me when you want to do that; I don't want to be with you when you fly on your broom. I bet it'ss even more dangerous than the Hippogriff."

Harry grimaced at the memory. Lucky for him and Nagini, Buckbeak hadn't minded the intruder under his cloak as much as he had first thought.

Then, he gazed at Nagini playfully. "Oh, sso you won't be with me next time I fly? What about your promisse to alwayss be around me, literally?"

The eight feet long female serpent pulled out her tongue, and if she had been human Harry was sure the gesture would have been to mock him. "Hn, big mouth. I will sstay outsside where I will be able to watch over you. We'll ssee to that when the time comess. For the moment you sshould hurry and put on your working clothess; the woman downsstairss musst be waiting for you."

Harry's eyes bugged out as he looked at the enchanted clock. "Damn!" he cursed to himself, and quickly changed into dry and warm clothes. "Are you coming, Nagini?"

The snake hissed in negative and coiled on the bed in a tight circle. "I'll passs for today; the flying made me nausseouss. Do take the owl with you, though, sso if ssomething happenss sshe will be able to alert me by flying through the outsside window."

Harry nodded and called for Hedwig, who easily landed on his shoulder. "Good thinking. I'll ssee you later, Nagini."

She gave the impression of nodding before saying goodbye. "Work well, young masster. And do come to bed at a normal hour; we do have to go back to the sschool early tomorrow."

Harry smiled and closed the door.

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Father,

Dumbledore has a new guest and he is around my age. No one really knows anything about him, not even that fool of a headmaster himself. I don't really know of his intentions, but he hangs a lot with those imbeciles of Gryffindors, even if some of them appear to be terrified of him. He looks reasonably powerful and he wears an aura of mystery and darkness around him. I thought it was something important to report, if the old codger has an interest in him. Best do a little research on him, though. His name is James Evans, and he oddly resembles that traitor, Black. Maybe Bellatrix would know something about him? I also know that he works at The Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade and I heard that his previous school had been destroyed.

I hope you will find some information on him, because I would like to see him get arrested or anything else nasty. He is seriously trying my patience and making me look like a fool in the eyes of other, which I find most displeasing.

I hope to hear more of you and our great Master soon,

Your son, Draco

Trouble is starting to brew! I hope some of your questions have been answered, like how come they don't suspect a thing about Harry's false name. What is there to suspect? Lily and James have been killed 17 years ago and they saw little Harry's dead body. For them, it is mere coincidence and nothing else.

Also, don't worry; I plan to make Harry play Quidditch after the Hols.

Next chapter: Peeves makes an apparition and James continues to be a guest in Hogwarts. Next classes: Potions and DADA.

REVIEWS ARE APPRECIATED!!! THANX!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos ;)

Chapter 9: Mind games

Harry let go of his precious Firebolt and, after reducing its size, he put it in the safety of his pocket. He chuckled shortly and patted his mid-section where he could hear a displeased hissing.

It was a short walk from the end of the Forbidden Forest to the castle, and he was happy to finally reach the school; today was a particularly cold day.

Several wandering students immediately spotted him when he entered but he ignored them in favor of gazing at the newly placed Christmas decorations. 'That's right. The exams will start next week, it the dates are the same from my old world.' Harry reminded himself.

He smirked when Peeves threw a dung bomb at some fourth years Slytherins and as they cried out in disgust.

"Think it's funny, do you?" Draco Malfoy drawled as soon as he saw the smirk, and the blonde walked toward him with narrowed eyes.

Harry's gaze stayed cold and riveted on him. Malfoy didn't appreciate that one bit; he was used to people cowering before him. "Now that you're alone let me warn you, you little nuisance! You better stay out of my way or else!" the blonde warned.

James lifted an amused eyebrow. "Or else what?" He then sneered in a manner that left Draco wondering if Snape and the boy before him were related.

"Is this a threat, Malfoy?" He laughed darkly and mockingly and the two goons beside the Slytherin Prefect snarled. James snarled back and stepped in their direction, making them wonder if he would truly attack them.

"I would instead advise –you- to stay out of –my- way, Malfoy. I have the tendency to become dangerous when I'm pissed." Harry

advised to the double of his second nemesis. He then backed away and started to walk in the direction of the Great Hall.

“That’s it! Go to your precious Dumbledore!” Malfoy taunted, a little irritated at being threatened back by a mere friend of the ‘Gryffindorks’.

James quickly turned his gaze on the blonde and sneered darkly, speaking just low enough so Malfoy and his two followers were the only ones to hear. “I don’t follow anyone, Malfoy. I’m my own master. You’d do good to remember that,” he spoke harshly and whirled around, disappearing through the open doors of the Great Hall.

Crabbe and Goyle wisely kept silent while Malfoy silently fumed. “Hey Peeves! Come here for a second!” He suddenly called the Poltergeist with a nasty grin, which flew to the blonde boy while cackling and throwing Dung bombs at everything he could see.

“Ye want to speak to me, blondie?” the ghost asked and laughed at the nickname.

Malfoy sneered at see-through mocker but willed himself to calm down: a Malfoy never loses his cool, a lesson his father had taught him. “Why yes, Peeves. I want you to purposefully bomb someone...”

The ghost was all ears.

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“Hiya James!” Colin Creevey greeted enthusiastically, completely ignoring the toast he was half-masticating.

James nodded his hello silently and sat at the offered place beside the fifth year. Colin’s friends and brother tried not to stare at him while James acknowledged the Headmaster with a simple look, which the old man answered with a smile of his own.

“Make way! Make way!”

The younger students gasped as Ron Weasley and his gang pushed them a little to sit near their new friend.

“Hey!” Colin protested, “Not fair! I invited him to sit beside me, not for you to take my place! You have him in your classes, isn’t that enough?!”

Ron grinned and shrugged. “Sorry Colin, but you’ll have to wait your turn! We’re the oldest, so we make the rules!”

Colin pouted and Dean and Seamus laughed good-naturedly. Ron turned toward James, who simply lifted an eyebrow to urge him to talk.

“Say mate, next week is our exams week and afterward it’ll be the holidays. Did you have something scheduled for the Christmas break?”

James took a sip of Pumpkin juice and nodded; Ron’s smile fell from his face. “Really? That’s too bad! What did you plan on doing?”

“Rosmerta’s pub will be full for the break and I want to be there to help her. Sorry Ron.” Harry answered to his disappointed friend.

Seamus grimaced. “You’re going to work on the Hols?! You’re crazy! What kind of life is that? You’re just seventeen, mate! Enjoy life a little!”

He eeped when James looked at him with sudden narrowed and dark eyes. The students around him stopped talking and looked uneasy for a moment, until Professor Black and Lupin intruded in their tense discussion.

“Something wrong, boys?” Black asked with a suspicious gaze subtly directed at James. The latter returned the gaze directly and with such intensity that it was Sirius who actually had to turn his head away and laugh half-heartedly to make the feeling pass, which made Remus look at Sirius weirdly.

Ron gave Black a quick grin and shook his head. "Nope, nothing wrong professors. Just asking James here if he had plans for the Hols; he just wants to go back to The Three Broomsticks."

Sirius hummed and Remus took his cue to lighten the conversation. "So, Mr. Evans, I guess we'll see each other this afternoon! The Gryffindors have double Potions with Slytherins and then DADA with Sirius and me. I can't wait!"

James had to smile lightly at Remus' enthusiasm and calming voice; he had missed the Werewolf very much. "I will be honored to attend one of your classes," James replied calmly, the small smile still on his lips.

He frowned, though, when Peeves appeared in the Great Hall and started to sing, which he did with a very horrible aptitude. His eyes quickly widened in small panic when he felt Nagini coil around him tighter, almost to the brink of cutting his air; she obviously disliked the sound the ghost was emitting and was barely holding herself from hissing angrily.

'Shit! Shit, shit, shit! Calm down Nagini!' Harry put a hand on his stomach quickly and got his wand, and at the good time, it seemed, because Peeves quickly zoomed over Gryffindor table to drop Dung bombs on him.

"WADDI WASI!" James cried out just as the projectiles headed toward him. The stink weapons stopped and rebounded toward Peeves. But Peeves being a ghost, the Dung bombs passed right through him and toward the one who had asked him to drop them on James.

The Slytherins shrieked and quickly ran away from the table. Crabbe and Goyle pushed Malfoy out of the way and they received the brown slimy stuff head on.

The Gryffindors started to laugh while Snape quickly made his way to them with a scowl. James grimaced, but it seemed as though the scowl wasn't directed at him.

Sirius was laughing loudly too, and Harry reveled in the gratifying sound he had missed so much. Remus was trying to stifle his laughter with a cough and smiled at James. "Don't worry Mr. Evans. We all know that wasn't intentional. Waddi Wasi has the tendency to thrust a projectile back to its original sender, so my guess is that young Malfoy wanted to sludge you. Severus will take care of this. On another note, I'd have to thank you. It's the first time in a while that I heard Sirius laugh like this."

James nodded with a small smile.

They all watched as the Potions Master muttered a Scourgify spell at the two goons; the sludge disappeared but the smell still stayed, making Crabbe and Goyle pinch their noses and Malfoy scowl even more, not really caring if they saved him from a totally embarrassing moment or not.

"You dopes! I don't want you hanging around me until you've washed this stench away!" the blonde Slytherin exclaimed while grimacing at the horrid smell.

Snape didn't take any points off but a warning glare was enough to calm them for the moment. Then, the teacher stalked away, probably to his dungeon since classes were about to start.

Ron slapped James on the back with a wide playful grin. "That was priceless, mate! I've never seen Malfoy look so pissed since we beat him in our first Quidditch game!"

Hermione tutted disapprovingly at her boyfriend. "Honestly, Ron! Who cares about Malfoy? Just deem James lucky for his fast reflexes!" She moved to smile at him but her face fell when he was no longer in front of her, but on his way to the dungeon with, yet again, his expressionless face.

"Whoa, tough crowd!" Dean muttered under his breath, but everyone heard him nonetheless.

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There weren't many people in Potions class since it was seventh year, so the four houses were reunited together. Everyone was paired with somebody else already so Harry thought it good to sit down on his own and try not to get noticed too much or get in Snape's way.

Speaking of Snape, he was already writing on the chalkboard and asking, more like ordering, the students to shut up in his own snappish way. "Today's potion will be difficult to brew, especially since the ingredients have all been prepared in advance. If anyone of you should...botch it or make it explode, in Mr. Longbottom or Weasley's case for example, you will automatically have a big zero for this project."

The Slytherins in the class snickered while Ron's face reddened in anger and Neville whimpered beside his partner.

Harry raised an eyebrow; he didn't know Neville had actually wanted to continue Potions when obviously he preferred the art of plants. Did he want to become an auror here?

He kept silent while Snape introduced the Potion and Harry sagged a little in his chair and thanked Merlin for the concoction they were about to make. It was the Polyjuice potion, with which Harry was VERY familiar with and this time Hermione, who sat beside Ron, was frowning at the chalkboard; she had never brewed that potion before it seemed.

Soon everyone got up and gathered their ingredients and started to read the instructions as carefully as possible. Snape walked to James, thinking that leaving Longbottom alone just for a few minutes couldn't be -that- bad.

"Mr. Evans, I heard that you never finished school. So what do you want to do during my class? Is there a potion you would like to brew?" he asked without his usual bit of degrading sarcasm.

James got up and gave him a quick glance, before looking over the table that still held some more ingredients. "Actually professor, if it's no trouble, I would also like to brew the Polyjuice potion."

Snape raised an eyebrow. "Oh? But Polyjuice takes a lot of skills and time and practice, and I doubt that-"

"I know sir. But you see; I know how to brew it. I've made this exact potion a long time ago."

Snape blinked and opened his mouth in surprise, but when no comeback came, he closed it and motioned toward the table.

Harry nodded his thanks silently and came back with the right ingredients, took a cauldron in the cauldron stash and immediately set off to work without even looking at the instructions in the front.

Severus was eyeing the boy with a watchful and calculating gaze while he chopped what needed to be chopped and grinded what needed to be grinded, and then stir the mixture in the right direction and with accuracy that left no doubt about he being able to do it since a long time ago. "Tell me Mr. Evans, since when were you able to brew Polyjuice? It is, after all, only in the seventh year curriculum."

Snape watched the boy warily as he sighed and lowered the fire under the cauldron. "I'll be honest with you, Mr. Snape. I needed this potion, it was primordial that I drink it to find some answers my friends and I needed. We brewed it in my second year, and it certainly wasn't a class assignment."

Snape's eyes widened. "WHAT?!"

All the eyes in the classroom turned toward them, and the teacher barked at them to mind their own potion.

"Are you telling me you actually brewed Polyjuice when you were twelve bloody years old, and that you did it without any teacher supervision?!"

James heard some muffled gasps and was aware that he was receiving wide eyed stares from the Ravenclaw students. "Yes," was the only response he gave as he added yet another ingredient and started to stir the potion again.

Snape was at a loss of words. "You do know that you could be tested and continue your studies here no problem if you demonstrated this kind of knowledge in the other classes?"

James shrugged. "I'm not really interested in finishing my schooling. At least not right now. I have things to do first." He omitted to mention those things, as some of them would clearly be illegal but necessary to prevent Voldemort from taking over.

Snape shook his head and went back to his students, not understanding why such an apparently gifted boy would be willing to give up on his studies like that.

Draco frowned from his place at the dark haired boy that took away all the attention. 'I'll get you yet!' he silently promised himself with a seething expression.

When class finished, everyone bottled their mixture and brought their sample on Snape's desk to be analyzed later. Since James wasn't a student, he waited for everyone to walk out before bringing his cauldron in the front. "Can you examine it since I won't be graded for this? I was pretty sure of myself even though Potions was never really my cup of tea. Actually, I stank at it royally."

Snape raised an eyebrow. "Really? I wouldn't have guessed; you actually looked pretty comfortable at your table."

James snorted. "That's because Polyjuice, as crazy as it sounds, is one of the handful of potions I am actually able to make without making a blunder."

"Like what?" the oldest man asked curiously.

James seemed to think about it for a moment. "Aside from Polyjuice? I guess I can make the Pepper-Up potion, the Dreamless Sleep

potion, Skele-Gro, the Calming Draught, the Sleeping Draught...I think that's about it."

Again, he omitted to say that he also knew how to make Veritaserum, which was illegal and only for use of the Ministry, and the ever precious Wolfsbane potion which wasn't mentioned in any potions book since it had been created by Snape himself.

Harry had had to learn how to make these in case something happened, and he had endured long hours of trials and errors and bad-mouthing from 'his' Snape to finally be able to make them without exploding a cauldron.

Snape's mind whirled with different thoughts but he kept silent and gave himself the task of inspecting the Polyjuice potion in front of him. "The consistency is spot on, as is the color, so the taste must be alright. Do you mind if I store it in my shelves? It would be a waste to toss it away."

James nodded with a shrug and excused himself; he was getting rather hungry. The teacher bottled the Polyjuice and accompanied the guest to the Great Hall since he was rather hungry himself.

James sat down beside Ron, who had left him a place, and Severus sat, surprisingly, beside Dumbledore instead of at the end of the table. Minerva was on the other side and Sirius was beside her, Remus coming right after. Flitwick, Hooch, Trelawney, and Manx were at the other.

"So Severus, how was class?" The old man asked with a twinkling smile.

Snape's mood wasn't up for Albus' jokes. "No cauldron exploded, which is a first. But I must bring to your attention the fact that your guest is well able to brew Polyjuice without even reading the instructions. Apparently he's been able to make it since he was twelve."

Albus' mood sobered and the others listened more closely. "Oh? But Polyjuice is very difficult to brew even for the seventh years. Why would he need it for?"

Some of them, especially Manx, seemed to think that the kid was someone else in disguise, using the Polyjuice. But Snape had been with the boy during a couple of hours and, knowing that the effect of the potion usually wore off after an hour, they set aside this idea.

Snape's already black eyes seemed to darken, and Albus called him on it. "He knows Polyjuice; barely possible, but okay. But it's his other array of potions that makes me speculate who he really is or what he has been or will be up to. Albus, this boy knows the entire list of medical potions that I make for Poppy, and then some!"

Dumbledore frowned while the nurse strained to hear. "Severus," she interrupted, "what kind of potions?"

Snape looked at Madam Pomfrey before answering. "Some of the most difficult ones, I assure you: Pepper-up, okay, that one isn't too difficult, but it's the others that got me suspicious. Dreamless Sleep, Calming Draught, Sleeping Draught, Skele-Gro..." he trailed off, noticing the bewildered and slightly apprehensive faces of his comrades.

"It's as if the boy learned to brew these potions because he needed them! That's completely ridiculous! I mean, why would a boy his age, if he really is who he pretends to be, need to take Dreamless Sleep, for Merlin's sake! This potion can be highly dangerous and can create a dependence if one takes it too often. Then again, nobody ever really needed its use, even in St-Mungo's. If he really needs it, he must have quite the nightmares! That's inconceivable!" the Potions Master finished in a harsh whisper laced with frustration

Albus stroked his long white beard while he gave a look over toward the Gryffindor table where Ronald and his classmates were having fun even though James kept his emotions in check. "Looks like I had a good idea by making him come here. We better keep a close eye on him; I want to know what are his interests and on which side he is."

Everyone nodded but Xiomara Hooch looked reluctant to believe that Rosmerta's helper could be a potential evil servant or a Death Eater in disguise, Polyjuice or not.

The populace started to get up and walk out since the afternoon classes were soon going to start. Sirius looked at Remus before getting up, but the golden eyed man caught Sirius' sleeve before he could walk away.

The Animagus lifted an eyebrow and Remus sighed. "Don't make him do anything stupid or dangerous in class, Sirius. I know Dumbledore wants us to watch him, but a part of me still wants to believe that there is some good under this dark aura of his..." Remus whispered while letting his grip on the sleeve weaken.

Sirius' intense eyes softened for just a second. "I want to believe you, Remus, but each fact we learn about him doesn't help his cause one bit."

Remus sighed and got up, silently following his partner toward the DADA classroom.

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"Listen up, guys! Today's lesson will be different from the other ones, so I want everybody on their best behavior or else I will cancel today's class."

The students immediately went to their respective seats and sat down. There was one place left beside Neville, surprisingly, in the middle of the classroom, so Harry sat down and nodded to the nervous boy beside him.

"I wonder what we will learn today..."

Harry heard Ron wonder from behind him, and they all waited for Black to start the lesson. Once he was satisfied with the quietness

Sirius nodded seriously and Remus sat down in a corner to observe the class with keen eyes.

“Since most of you will be going back home for the Christmas Hols, I will be teaching you, under strict permission, how to defend yourselves against the first Unforgivable, since none of you are impervious to attacks. You will be learning how to shake off Imperio, though most of you will not be able to stop its effects, of that I am sure. It’s very powerful and since it can control ones mind you can’t really do anything about it; at least you will be able to recognize its effects.”

Everyone started to speak at the same time with enthusiasm and fear. “Imperio! Wow! I can’t believe Black’s going to show us an Unforgivable!” Seamus exclaimed to his friends and they nodded fervently.

Malfoy smirked arrogantly from his place. “That’s nothing! Imperio can only be fought by the strongest, so that’s why none of you Gryffindorks will be able to shake it off!” he taunted.

Ron’s face started to become its telltale color of anger but before he could say anything Malfoy’s eyes became hazy; he got up and started to run around the classroom, much to the Gryffindors’ surprise and the Slytherins’ shock.

“Malfoy?!” Pansy screeched, “What the hell are you doing?!”

Suddenly the blonde’s eyes went back to normal and he blinked stupidly, looking around him in confusion. “Why the heck am I standing in the middle of the class?”

Sirius walked up to him, put his hand on the boy’s shoulder and pushed him down so he sat back in his chair. “Looks like you are not as strong as you said, Mr. Malfoy. You, young man, were under the effect of Imperio.” Sirius said with a stern voice, not letting the Slytherin Prefect rage his disgrace and humiliation at being used as a test subject.

“Next time someone wants to boast, the same thing will happen to you,” Remus warned with a sudden dangerous tone of voice.

The students shuddered when they saw that their teachers weren't kidding this time. They were working with an Unforgivable, after all. Even Ron held his mouth shut before some quick mock could come out regarding the Slytherin's weakness.

Sirius first asked them to try the Imperio in teams of two, so everyone stayed at their desk and started to work with their partner. They waved their wands, some with a little more accuracy than others, and all started to speak the spell. No one was having any luck so far.

Harry kept his wand in his pocket and instructed Neville to try first on him. The boy gulped and nodded, waving his wand a little too extravagantly. James eeped and stepped out of the way as a spark of magic almost burned him.

“Don't try so much, Neville. You don't have to wave your wand like that. Normally, someone will be able to use Imperio when he possesses a great force of the mind. I don't expect any of you to succeed.” Sirius gently admonished the nervous wreck that was Neville; Sirius knew that his parents had been killed by Unforgivables and that the boy was touchy on the subject.

Black continued to walk around when Neville nodded. Draco was having as much difficulty as the others it seemed, and Harry found it funny that the son of a Death Eater, hell! Draco was probably a Death Eater himself, that he wasn't able to pull it off.

Sometimes a student would start to sing, albeit horribly, or run around like Malfoy did, or even jump on the desk or dance. Sirius, the instigator of these little shows, would bring an end to the spell and the subject would only redden in embarrassment at what they didn't remember doing right in front of everyone to see.

Ron wasn't an exception when he did a cartwheel, almost kicking Dean in the process. When he came back to and his friends told him what he had done, Ron could only blink in surprise. “A cartwheel? But

I don't even know how to do it! How is that possible, Professor Black?"

Sirius continued to walk around as if nothing happened, but he did answer the redhead. "People under the Imperius are not aware of their actions, Mister Weasley. So if the attacker wants you to do something you will do it no matter how hard it is. You simply have no control over your ACTIONS!" Suddenly, as he shouted the word 'actions', he turned toward James, who was still trying to help Neville and who still had to try the curse himself. He used the Imperius against the dark haired boy.

The sudden aggressive motion alarmed Harry, whose eyes narrowed and darkened, and he didn't think twice before slapping his mental barrier against the first dark curse and he pushed the intruder away without even having the conscience of who did it.

Sirius wasn't prepared for such an onslaught of a response so he didn't even have the time to gasp when he was thrown backward by the force of the blow. He landed roughly back first against his desk and slid down on the floor while Remus cried out at seeing his friend being pushed back so forcefully.

The classroom was completely silent as James blinked out of his barrier and ran toward the fallen teacher. Harry didn't think twice before kneeling beside a winded Sirius and Remus, who was in the also in a kneeling position. "Merlin I'm so sorry! Are you alright? Are you hurt? Do you need to go to Madam Pomfrey?"

Remus blinked at the barrage of questions and stared at the boy; the intensity of worry in the boy's eyes astonished him greatly. Evans looked desperate and the concern he showed, the first real emotion the Werewolf saw him show in public, was, in his opinion, a little too much for a simple teacher whom he didn't even know.

James kept stroking Sirius' hair gently and probing the man's limbs to see if everything was in order as if he knew the man familiarly.

Sirius winced but managed to mutter "I'm okay, don't worry."

Remus got up and helped Sirius to get back on his feet.

James was breathing rapidly and looked on the verge of tears as he continued his inspection of Sirius, which Remus found unsettling. Why was the boy showing such feelings, out of a sudden? Was it because of the guilt? Because he had hurt Sirius? Would he have acted the same way if it had been a student?

Remus didn't think so, because the boy was looking at both Sirius and him with such vehemence and concern that it had to be only about them. Remus found the way to smile reassuringly and swat the prying hands off playfully. "Don't worry, Sirius is a tough man," he tried to joke lightly.

Sirius was now standing on his feet and had regained his full bearings, and he smirked back. "Yeah, don't you worry about me, kid!"

James sighed in pure relief, blinked, and then his eyes became dull and shadowy. He tensed and straightened suddenly, his voice taking an abrupt emotionless tone. "Good. And never do that again."

He turned around as Sirius' smirk morphed into an anxious frown. "I'm going out a bit to get some fresh air." James walked out of the classroom stiffly and with no further explanations.

Draco Malfoy rubbed his chin and he leered at the departing boy. "Hm, maybe there's some hope for him after all. He could be a great member of the Slytherin house."

Ron's eyes widened at the statement and he took this as a personal offence. "NO BLOODY WAY IN HELL! He'll never be a slimy Slytherin, Malfoy!" he shouted angrily.

Pansy smirked and it made her look even more repulsive. She put her hands on her hips and tried to look imposing and arrogant. "And why not, Weasley? He just shook off one of the darkest curse there is! He is fit for greatness!"

Seamus stuttered crossly and blurted out: "Well, he rode a Hippogriff!!! No Slytherin can ride a Hippogriff! He's a Gryffindor through and through!"

Everyone who didn't know about this little tid bit of information gasped, and this included the teachers, who gazed at each other with apprehensive eyes. Remus brought Sirius on the side and looked at the opened door longingly. "Sirius, please make them calm down. I want- I want to see if the boy is okay. His many reactions completely took me off guard and remember what Dumbledore said anyway; we have to keep an eye on him."

Sirius eyed his friend warily and unsurely. "Remus, he shook off the Imperius as if it was nothing. Nothing! I didn't even have the time to enter his mind; he pushed me away even before my influence touched him. That boy can be dangerous; remember that Death Eaters can take any appearance they want with Polyjuice or any other trick."

Remus shook his head negatively and sighed, knowing that Sirius could really be hard-headed when he wanted. "I'm going after him, Sirius." And before the Animagus could reply, Remus was out the door.

"Okay class, settle down! I don't care to know in which house Mr. Evans could be seeing as he merely is a guest of the headmaster for the moment. At least now you know what a powerful mind can do when it's time to shake off the Imperius curse." Sirius bellowed with a sudden lack of patience.

The students sat back down reluctantly to continue the lesson, and now the atmosphere was thick, too thick to continue the practical part of the course. Sirius made them read some pages in their Defense book and sat down at his desk.

He was completely lost in his thoughts. "A powerful mind indeed...Be careful, Remus," he muttered to himself, turning to look out the window.

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Remus was worried that the young man would be gone, but when he found James the boy was simply breathing in some fresh winter air. The Werewolf frowned a little when James rubbed his middle section for a few minutes but he didn't look wounded so he shrugged it off. "I really want to apologize for my colleague's action, Mr. Evans. He didn't listen to me and he always does what he wants."

The voice startled Harry out of his reverie and the hand on his stomach lept to his pocket. He felt Nagini coil tighter around him but she didn't move any further. 'No, Sirius never listened to anyone...' he said to himself mentally with some dry tone of humor.

"I know...uh, noticed." Harry quickly fixed his slip up when Remus looked at him funnily, but then he walked beside the young man and fixed the sky, although the older man was really tempted to fix the boy a long stare instead. "So," Remus started out of the blue, "how were you able to shake off Imperio so effectively?"

The Werewolf guised the question as a perfectly honest and innocent one, but Harry wasn't fooled; the man wanted some answers, and for once Harry told parts of the truth. Lying to Remus, the man who had given his life to save him back in his world, just didn't seem like the right thing to do.

His false blue eyes darkened and Remus sniffed the boy surreptitiously; he almost whined childishly because he still didn't recognize the strange scent. But there was something definitively dark about the boy; good dark or bad, it was left to determine.

"Imperio isn't that difficult to shake off once you know how to do it. But I didn't learn this by practicing it; it's more of a matter of how many times I've been subjected to it when I was younger."

Remus stiffened at the revelation and let the boy speak; he was now very interested, but the boy didn't elaborate that much on the matter. He was surely leaving some crucial information out, but the boy was opening his heart a little and it was enough for the time being.

“I’ve first been subjected to Imperio by one of my teachers in my fourth year. Turned out that he was a Death Eater in disguise and the real man was locked in a compartment trunk. Anyway, they’re all dead now, aren’t they? But to go back on the matter, I shook Imperio off on my first try but it wasn’t meant to be the last time people tried to assault me with it.”

Remus started to breathe again when the boy finished his explanation, not even aware that he had held his breath in the first place. But he was even more startled by the boy’s next actions.

James turned toward him, his hands held in tight fists; they were shaking...the boy was obviously trying to stop his entire body from shaking as he stared at the Werewolf with deep eyes so full of emotion it actually scared Remus.

“I didn’t want to hurt Sirius,” the boy started with a cracking voice, “you know I could never hurt him, huh Remus? You know I could never hurt the both of you? I could never...” Harry lost his voice as unshed tears threatened to fall on his flushed cheeks.

The boy wrapped his arms around himself as if trying to comfort himself and he turned around, kicking himself mentally for showing such weakness.

Remus didn’t understand what the boy was talking about, neither did he understand how James could speak about Sirius and him with such familiarity. Just this once the older man listened to his inner voice and not to the others’ and he put his hands on the dark haired boy’s shoulders as a gesture of comfort.

Harry slowly lifted his head and he allowed himself just this one moment of fondness by relaxing and leaning into Remus’ given comfort.

He never turned around to look at the man, though, because he was sure and certain that if he did, he would not be able to hold his secrets in.

After a few silent minutes James moved away from the one holding his shoulders and waved at Remus with true gentle smile, which soon enough transformed into a look of indifference, much to Remus' exasperation. The Werewolf wanted to pierce the boy's defenses but James never left him the time to do it.

"It's getting late; I should go back to Hogsmeade."

Remus stuttered and stepped in his direction as the boy walked away. "W-wait!"

James turned around and waited for him to say what he wanted to say, but that was the problem: Remus didn't quite know why but he wanted the young man to stay for some unknown reason. When he noticed that the silence had stretched and that James was still waiting for him to talk, Remus blurted out the first question that came on his mind. "Is it true that you mounted one of Hagrid's Hippogriffs?" The Werewolf's cheeks became a light pink at asking this question as if he was a curious child.

James' eyes became playful and mysterious at the same time. He turned around and brought his fingers to his mouth to let out a loud whistle. Remus blinked at the sound but gaped as a Hippogriff flew over to them from the Forbidden Forest and landed in front of James, squawking at the boy and trying to get one of the James' hands to pet its head.

James mounted the creature and smirked when he saw Remus' face. "Those people are so easily surprised it's like a joke. They should see what else I'm able to do..."

"I've been told that Buckbeak belonged to the half-giant Groundkeeper named Hagrid. I can't wait to meet him!" James said genuinely and kicked the creature's sides lightly to get Buckbeak to fly.

Remus stared silently as the boy flew away on the Hippogriff's back and, once he was no longer in his line of vision, he turned around to go back inside where Sirius was certainly waiting for him. "He'll be as interested in you as you are in him, Mr. Evans..." Remus muttered to himself as some students ran beside him. He ignored them in favor of getting lost in his thoughts. "Most especially when he's supposed to get back tomorrow."

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Draco,

I am most pleased with you. This information has interested our Lord when I told him about this James Evans. I want you to keep me informed of the boy's activities or if he shows signs of bending toward the dark side. Something is amiss, because I have asked our Lord if any schools had been destroyed in the past years and the only one which has was located in France, ruined in one of His attacks three years ago; the boy's is obviously not French from what you've told me. Dumbledore's guest is hiding something, or maybe he is not who he says he is. Do be careful AND quiet about this, I do not need to receive a note from the teachers saying that you started some kind of trouble in school. Our Master needs to know if this guest will be a danger to his future plans. Try to gauge the boy's magical powers, though I am sure he is not that strong, with his filthy muggle name and all. Write back as soon as possible,

Lucius

I've finally finished this chapter! (sags in her chair) I've been working on it in my infinitely small spare time this week, but I've managed a good 16 pages.

Next chapter: Hagrid meets James as he returns from a mission for the Order and he spends some time with the interested half-giant. I'll probably throw in Divination class with Trelawney...Yeah, I smell a

death threat in the air... -It's the last day of school of the week, and the next is the exams, which means that James will not be present in the classes.

REVIEWS ARE APPRECIATED!!!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos ;)

Chapter 10: Down memory lane

“I’m telling you, Sirius! You have to talk to him! He practically broke down when I spoke with him yesterday. He was so very sorry about what happened! I think he’s so lonely that he hides behind a thick shell; he needs somebody to talk to. And you should really start by asking for forgiveness.”

Sirius gazed at Remus incredulously. “What ever should I say sorry for!”

The Werewolf scowled at his friend. “I told you not to force the boy into anything during class but you didn’t listen, as usual! It’s your fault what happened yesterday in the first place!”

Sirius recoiled and sighed when his friend put some emphasis behind his reprimanding words and scowled even deeply. “All right, all right! I’ll go talk to the kid as soon as I can.” The animagus sighed again and simply walked away with a barely concealed sad expression.

Remus’ own eyes became cheerless as he watched his long time friend walk away dejectedly. “I’m sorry Sirius, but I think that you and that boy are more alike than you think, in a way. Maybe he’ll do you some good, and maybe you’ll do him some good. I know I’m ready to help him no matter what people say or think of him,” the golden haired man whispered to himself as he walked in a different direction.

Surprisingly, when Remus entered the Great Hall, James was already at the head table and greeting the friendly, albeit imposing half-giant.

“Who are yeh?” Hagrid asked with his big rough voice.

James, to the others’ surprise, didn’t step back or stare impolitely; he offered his hand with a decisive thrust and Hagrid offered his with a cautious gaze.

James shook firmly and let the large hand go with a smile. Hagrid raised an eyebrow and looked at Dumbledore, who merely shrugged and went back to speaking with Minerva.

“Hello! My name is James Evans and I’m a guest here. I was impatient to meet you! I’ve heard nothing but good things regarding Hagrid the Groundskeeper. I must felicitate you for having taken such a good care of your Hippogriff! I love him to death!”

Harry couldn’t help the big smile that lit his entire face as he spoke to the dumbfounded and slightly blushing half-giant. Hagrid had been his first true friend in the Wizarding World and seeing him again was almost as good as seeing Sirius and Remus, and right before seeing Ron and Hermione who had been next.

“Um, thank you, Mister...um, Evans.” Hagrid didn’t quite know what to say to this guest who showed such an interest in his ‘pets’. It was all so sudden that he stayed rooted on the spot.

The bearded man jumped slightly when the boy looked behind him and suddenly waved his hand.

“Hi Remus!”

The Werewolf, and almost all of the teachers for that matter, raised an eyebrow at James. Why was this usually somber boy so cheerful all of a sudden? Remus waved back hesitantly and a little disgruntled that it had been Hagrid and not him to make him smile like that. But something was odd about that smile, as if it didn’t quite reach his eyes, or was it the eyes that were the problem? Remus shook his head to clear his puzzled thoughts and sat down at his place.

When Remus waved back James turned toward Hagrid again. “I really hope you’ll be able to show me more of your beautiful creatures! I really liked Buckbeak, by the way!”

Hagrid’s eyes widened and he looked at the boy carefully. “How do yeh know his name’s Buckbeak? Did somebody tell yeh?”

James shook his head negatively and his eyes suddenly held a mysterious look to them. "Hmm, no. A little birdie told me." The boy chuckled slightly at Hagrid's wary expression and shook his head. "No, seriously, I would really like to see your creatures," he replied, noticeably step-siding Hagrid's question.

Hagrid seemed to forget his previous guardedness at the thought of showing his pets to someone who was really interested, and anyway, if Buckbeak really liked him he couldn't be that bad; Dumbledore also let him in so he was to be treated like a guest.

Hagrid was about to reply with a big grin when someone from the head table started to snort crudely. It turned out it was Manx, the Care of magical Creatures' professor, and Hagrid's mood became sad and withdrawn.

Manx ignored the look he received from Dumbledore and started to mock the half-giant. "I wouldn't do that if I were you, Evans. Hagrid's beasts are savage and dangerous to anyone who approaches them too much. Personally, I think that a Hippogriff is dumb and a total menace to society, like any other dark creatures in this world."

The man started to laugh again, although he was the only teacher to find this laughable. A couple of Slytherins held in their snickers but everyone gasped as Manx found himself at the ending point of a wand.

The Care of magical Creatures teacher immediately stopped laughing and looked at the dark haired teen warily while the other teachers got up swiftly and pointed their own wand toward James, who didn't even bat an eyelash and kept his eyes riveted on Manx.

The look James gave him was hostile and aggressive, the twin blue pools becoming a shade darker as he narrowed his eyes into slits and lifted his head slightly, making his long bangs fall in front of his eyes. It made him appear as an even darker wizard and Manx got up and then stuttered backwards. "Don't you point that thing at me kid!" the teacher said angrily.

James almost snarled but put his wand back in his wand holster cautiously, giving one last purely emotionlessly look at Manx. He turned around, closed his eyes and tried to regain his calm. "Next time you say this I will not stop." James started calmly; his voice was the only thing heard in the Great Hall.

No students dared to talk; that boy had threatened a teacher! A teacher! Manx snorted rudely.

"Why do you care? And what makes you think you can defeat me!"

It's at that moment that Sirius entered the Great Hall but he stopped in his tracks when he noticed the commotion and the tenseness in the atmosphere. Nobody even noticed him anyway as they stared at the front where Manx and Evans were obviously having a tumultuous exchange.

'What would make Evans so mad?' Sirius asked himself silently while looking at what was going to happen.

"Not all dark creatures are considered evil or bad, Manx. You shouldn't judge people or animals by their titles but by what they are as an individual and by their actions."

If he hadn't been inside the school Manx would have spit on the ground. "Bullshit! All dark creatures are heinous and are not worth anything! They should all be killed!" he spat in disgust.

Next thing he knew he was sliding down the wall and nursing a very painful wound on his stomach because of the Expelliarmus he received from James' quick reflexes.

The teachers didn't even have the time to stop the teen but even if they had they doubted they would have wanted to stop James.

The students gasped in shock as James finally lowered his wand; his frigid gaze, though, he maintained and aimed continuously at the winded man. "Maybe it's you who should be killed. You're outright wishing for the death of one of the faculty members of this very

school, you fool. And I assure you: he's a better man than what you will ever be."

Manx gasped and gazed at Lupin discreetly; the students didn't understand why or what James was talking about. Ron turned toward Hermione and his friends and whispered curiously: "There's a cursed teacher here?" Nobody answered him as they were as clueless as him at the moment.

Remus' heart started to pound in his ribcage and it took all of his willpower not to start hyperventilating. 'Does James know what I am!' He glanced at the almost perfect copy of Sirius but James didn't spare him a look; he was too concentrated on Manx at the moment to notice anything else.

Harry was mentally happy that the guy had finally showed his true colors but he also had to refrain from wincing. His chance to gain their trust was now probably completely obliterated, but if this was the price to pay to be here and protect them he was ready to pay for it. Nobody insulted his friends, and even his family as Remus and Sirius virtually fell into that category, even if they didn't know it right now.

He walked toward the exit without looking at anyone. Sirius' heart almost stopped as the boy gave him a short sad glance and simply strolled away.

The Animagus couldn't help, for a short moment, but feel some kind of sympathy for the boy. He wasn't sure if James knew that Remus was a Werewolf –maybe he had spoken about Hagrid's half-giant status- because nobody knew this piece of information except for the teachers. They had been really careful all these years to hide Remus' tricky condition because if the students had known they would have told their parents, and then the ministry would have taken his friend away since dark creatures were considered a menace and unreliable. Many of them had already joined the Dark Lord so it didn't help Remus' difficult cause.

Sirius walked up to the head table where Manx was trying to get up with as much dignity he could muster, muttering about the boy's

nerve to attack him. "Why didn't you stop him Albus!" Manx raged as he regained his footing.

Dumbledore furrowed his brow at the man. "You and I will have to have a small conversation in my office, Magnus Manx. Your behavior today was immature and you deliberately insulted a member of my faculty! As such, you will write a letter of excuse to Hagrid here whom you have publicly offended. I do not vouch for Mr. Evans' actions but he was right to stop you before it went too far. I will also have a talk with him; you do not have to worry about that."

The old headmaster omitted to mention that he had also offended Remus but he had an idea that Manx knew he would have to write not one but two letters. This didn't quite dwell right with Manx so he stalked away from the room with big heavy strides.

The teachers sat back awkwardly and Albus sighed. "Won't we ever have a normal day? Ever since Mr. Evans came here there has been nothing but more trouble."

Hagrid didn't sit down and fidgeted on his spot. "Well, I didn't think he was that bad when he presented himself ter me! I think he's a kinda nice, although very impulsive young man. I don' know where you've found him Headmaster but I like him!" the big man finished fearlessly.

Minerva found the way to chuckle weakly. "Hagrid, anyone who shows an interest to your pets, you like. It's not complicated."

The other teachers agreed and laughed lightly while Hagrid reddened. "I'll go talk ter him, if I can find him," Hagrid finally replied.

He walked beside Sirius and the Animagus stopped Hagrid, suddenly eager to help. "He went outside. If you walk fast enough you may reach him before he goes back to Hogsmeade."

The teachers gave Sirius a weird look but he ignored them. "Talk to him if you wish; I don't think he'll willingly attend Transfiguration this morning. Tell him there's Divination this afternoon if he feels like it and to not go back to the village immediately afterward. I would like to speak to him."

Hagrid nodded at Sirius thankfully and silently marched away.

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When Hagrid finally caught up with James, he was surprised to find the boy standing near his hut and chatting mindlessly with Buckbeak. When the Hippogriff saw his owner he squawked happily and strolled to Hagrid, butting his head to be petted and fed. "I think he likes yeh!" Hagrid said out of the blue, breaking off the ice between them.

James gave a sad smile and sat down on the stairs of Hagrid's hut even though they were cold from the temperature. "Well he also likes you. I can tell you take good care of your animals. Do you have any more?"

Hagrid nodded enthusiastically and nearly pulled James' arm off to guide him to his animal pen. "Look! I have three Blast-Ended Skrewts! Aren't they adorable?" the childish half-giant asked with a jovial expression.

James chuckled nervously as he jumped away from a ball of fire thrown in his direction. "Yeah...adorable."

Hagrid nodded fervently and pushed him to the next pen with a renewed fervor; it wasn't everyday someone actually asked him to show his pets to them and not running away as soon as he saw the creatures.

As Hagrid showed the second enclosure, a big dog ran to him and barked happily. The half-giant laughed heartily and petted it enthusiastically. "Look James! This here is Fang! He's my Boarhound, he is! Say hello to James, Fang!"

The huge dog approached the dark haired boy and Hagrid told him not to be afraid. He didn't need to warn James, however, because the teen never backed away. "Hi Fang!" Harry put his hands in front of the dog's muzzle and Fang sniffed him out, whined almost in pity and licked the offered hands. Harry briefly wondered if the dog knew who he was but Fang wouldn't be the one to tell anyone.

“Good boy.” He petted the Boarhound and Fang sauntered away, chasing after an errant Bowtruckle. Hagrid was happy that Fang liked the boy and he incited James to continue the visit.

“These here are Flobberworms and I hope you already know what is in that cage?”

James nodded. “It’s a Cornish Pixie. I kind of have a not so pleasant memory of them from my second year.”

Hagrid looked thoughtful for a moment and he nodded to himself, making Harry wonder what he was up to. “James, yeh don’t have any prejudices against any creatures considered to be dark, do yeh?”

James shook his head negatively and gave Hagrid a curious look. “Not really. They can’t fight against what they are; it’s in their nature and we can’t change a thing about it. Personally, I’ve been in the presence of many throughout the past years: it wasn’t easy everyday but I’m still here, aren’t I? And when I mean many, it’s a LOT.”

Hagrid was now terribly curious about what kind of creatures he had seen or lived with or even fought, but by looking at the serious boy the half-giant wasn’t so sure if he truly wanted to know anymore. “People are almost always looking down at me because of my half-giant nature and because I like more dangerous animals, it’s so unfair.”

“But sometimes dangerous creatures are more interesting, aren’t they?” James asked conspiratorially.

Hagrid nodded playfully and winked. “I knew I liked yeh for a reason! You would have loved Fluffy and Norbert!”

Harry was mentally stunned; Hagrid had had them even here where the restriction of dark creatures was at its highest vigilance! He faked interest perfectly. “Fluffy and Norbert? Do tell.”

Hagrid told him as they walked toward his hut. "Fluffy was a gigantic three-headed dog I acquired some years ago to protect something. But when Dumbledore was finally able to give the object to his friend I had to liberate him because I couldn't keep it. Norbert was a baby Norwegian Ridgeback, a dragon. I loved him to death as soon as he cracked his egg, but young Draco Malfoy, who was serving detention with Weasley and under Filch's orders, was outside and pried into my business. Dumbledore had to give Norbert away before the ministry got wind of this; one of Ronald Weasley's brothers, Charlie, took Norbert with him. He works with dragons, so I'm sure Norbert is happy there."

Harry spied a wayward tear falling on the large man's cheek and smiled softly; Hagrid was still a big softy underneath that imposing figure of his. He patted the man's back and gave a reassuring smile. "I'm sure they're also thinking about you, Hagrid."

The Groundskeeper nodded and sniffed loudly, his pout changing into a grin as he pushed the door to his hut opened. "Now I'm hiding another creature into m'hut! Look James! Isn't she a beauty?" Hagrid asked enthusiastically while pointing at a specially warded box.

James approached slowly and felt, at each step, the temperature in the room getting higher. He peaked into the box and gaped, putting a hand on his middle-section to prevent Nagini from hissing in a warning manner. "That's an Ashwinder! Hagrid, those are very rare and dangerous! It can burn your hut if you're not careful!" James exclaimed in shock.

Hagrid nodded and explained: "Dumbledore knows it's here. In fact, he's the one who put the spell on the box to prevent the snake from burning everything when it lays its eggs. And anyway, I don't even give it enough time to burn anything since I take the eggs almost immediately and give them to Professor Snape. Ashwinder eggs are rare and very in demand for a Potions Master. They are precious to some potions. The only hard part is to take them; the snake can be really treacherous and burn me good, which happened a couple of times already." Hagrid shrugged bashfully and showed the bandaged hand.

James sighed and shook his head disapprovingly, but he refrained from saying anything of it. He could hear the Ashwinder mutter angrily about the “ssstupid half-giant ssstealing hisss beloved eggsss” and tried to hold in a small chuckle. It was surely frustrating, having your eggs being stolen right in front of your eyes.

“Oh, that’s right!” Hagrid seemed to remember when he looked at the magically enchanted clock on his huge desk. “Sirius still wants to talk to you!”

Harry’s heart suddenly started to beat faster and he cocked his head on the side. “Oh?”

“Yes, after today’s classes! He told me himself! You’ll still go to Divination class, right?”

James’ mood sobered but he nodded nonetheless. He was angry at Manx, so it wasn’t a good reason to ignore everyone and break the mood of the people around him. Hagrid seemed to understand James’ sudden change in temper. “Don’t yeh worry about what happened this morning. Professor Manx deserved what you did to him, although I don’t recommend you doing this often. You’ve got some spirit, I’ll tell yeh that kid!” Hagrid laughed and excused himself momentarily when he heard Fang bark outside.

Harry watched his friend close the door and turned toward the box once again. The red fire-snake was still muttering and when it saw Harry he sprouted some more vicious commentaries, which made Harry raise an eyebrow. “You sshouldn’t sspeak ssuch bad wordss, my dear. They do not ssuit your elegance.”

The Ashwinder immediately stopped hissing and gazed at Harry with new eyes. “You sspeak! You sspeak the noble language of the ssnakess, yet you did not sstop the big man! You did not tell him to not ssteal my eggss anymore!” It started to hiss again with renewed fervor and Harry sighed.

“I wissh I could but they cannot know that I sspeak the noble language. But I want you to know that your eggss are very preciouss

to humans, too. They serve an equally noble purpose and it should be an honor to you to help their cause. Several potions containing Ashwinder eggs can save lives. You should be proud to be one of the only creatures who does that."

The snake seemed to think about it for a moment. "I admit it is pleasing to know that. I may let the Giant take my eggs with little less difficulty, if only you promise me to come talk to me sometimes and tell me how many lives my eggs have saved. I get lonely, sometimes."

Harry nodded. "I may not be able to come often, though. But I'm sure that Nagini wouldn't mind coming sometimes."

"Who is Nagini?"

Harry brought his hand forward and a head poked through, surprising the Ashwinder. "You are!" It started, but Nagini interrupted the red snake in favor of reprimanding the boy.

"Try as you may, you will not be able to make me leave your side so easily. I promised I would stay with you and protect you, man-snake!"

Harry chuckled and told Nagini to chill out. "Okay, okay, I won't force you to go out. It was only a passing thought."

Nagini seemed to nod and the head poking out of the sleeve of Harry's cloak turned in the direction of the fire snake. "And you, I will permit this but you are never to hurt my man-snake! If you do—"

The Ashwinder looked appalled by such an idea. "Why I never! I will never hurt him! He has been so nice to me and he is the first human to understand me! I will never hurt him."

Harry turned his head back and forth and frowned in annoyance as they conversed as if he wasn't even there. "Guys! I'm still here I'll let you know!"

Suddenly, Nagini hid back into the cloak and everything became silent. Hagrid reopened the door and excused his short absence. "Sorry for leaving you alone like this but Fang finally caught the wandering Bowtruckle! I had to put it in a cage; it wasn't easy."

James nodded and got up, hoping that Hagrid hadn't heard anything. The half-giant looked completely clueless so he relaxed slightly. "I better go back to the castle. The others must be waiting for me. Thanks for everything Hagrid. We'll see each other again."

They shook hands and Hagrid watched as James took his leave. The temperature in the room suddenly increased and the Half-Giant stepped toward the box hurriedly: the Ashwinder was about to lay eggs.

Hagrid braced himself as soon as they appeared but when he put his hand into the box all he felt was the usual hotness of the creature. Not one bite, not one hiss or any other form of retaliation. The snake looked at him for a moment and coiled around itself the next, ignoring his presence.

Hagrid gazed at the red eggs in his hand. "Odd."

He looked outside in the direction James had gone. 'The Ashwinder never willingly gave his eggs away before. So why now?'

.....

Talking with Hagrid took longer than he thought and when Harry arrived in the Great Hall, everyone had already gone to their next class. "Damnit!" he swore, and then hurried it up toward the Divination tower.

He wasn't so late, only of a couple of minutes, but he didn't want to arrive in the middle of the class. Harry stopped briskly, looked around to make sure that no one was spying on him and he murmured a password in front of a portrait. With one last look around he closed the door and started to run again.

He arrived not five minutes later in front of the classroom door and adorned a grim and detached expression just by hearing Trelawney's boring voice on the other side.

He knocked softly and braced himself; as soon as the woman opened the door the sharp stench of dried tea leaves attacked his nose. The classroom was the same from what it had been in his world before Firenze had made his apparition.

"Yes? What can I do for you young man?" Trelawney asked with her dreamy voice and gazing at him with her overly thick glasses that made her look like an old barmy owl.

James gazed at her with a look nearing blatant disregard and he entered the class. "You're the Divination teacher, not me. You're supposed to know."

The students started to snicker at the face Sybill made while Parvati scowled deeply. "Don't mock Professor Trelawney! She's a great Seer!"

James ignored her and sat beside a snickering Ron. Seamus rolled his eyes and muttered "teacher's pet!" which made Parvati scowl even more. Sybill didn't find it funny to be mocked by James but she held her tongue in favor of continuing the class. "Now children! Look into your crystal ball and tell me what you see! Broaden your minds!" she said dramatically while gesticulating imposingly.

Ron rolled his eyes and asked James to join Neville and him to look into the "damn ball". James chuckled and complied, letting Neville have the first go.

"So James," Ron started in a whisper, "you've made yourself quite the reputation by attacking a teacher-"

"It was bloody awesome! I've been wanting to do that to his sorry ass for a long time!" Dean suddenly interrupted the redhead and he received a warning glare from Trelawney. He blushed and went back

to his ball-gazing, but not before doing a thumbs-up to James in support.

The guys snickered again but turned away as soon as Sybill's gaze fell on them. "This is such a total waste of time! I don't see anything!" Neville exclaimed while pushing the ball in Ron's direction.

The youngest Weasley boy grimaced and pushed it toward James. "Have fun. This thing doesn't work for me. Inner eye my butt! She never predicted anything real!" he muttered darkly under his breath.

Harry knew all too well what he meant, except the true prediction part: Sybill Trelawney's Seer power was erratic and uncontrolled, but it was present (and consequently ruining Harry's life).

He sighed and gazed in the ball nonetheless to pass the time. But the more he stared, the more his eyes became hazy and unfocused; he was soon not moving at all.

Not Harry! Spare Harry! The green light was heading towards him when suddenly it ricocheted towards his attacker...

The cupboard under the stairs...

The first day of school in Hogwarts...

His fight with Quirrell and Voldemort to gain the Philosopher Stone...

The Basilisk and the memory of Tom Riddle...

Sirius Black escaping Azkaban with only two names in his head: Harry Potter and Peter Pettigrew, Professor Lupin, the Dementors...

The Tri-Wizard Tournament and the return of Voldemort in the cemetery...

Umbridge, the Occlumency lessons, Sirius! Sirius falling into the veil!...

The last war, deaths, so many deaths! Blood! Dumbledore, McGonagall, Snape, Ron and Hermione! REMUS! NOOO!

Harry snapped back to reality when he heard James' name being called and he pushed the ball away with a sudden fierceness.

"Hey mate! You spaced out for a minute! Are you okay?" Ron asked with concern.

"Did you see something!" Trelawney was immediately at James' side, pushing Ron and Neville out of the way. She tried to look into James' eyes but he refused to meet her gaze; his mood turned darker as he glared at the floor and his fists were white as he balled them tightly.

"I merely fazed out for a minute. It's nothing. I didn't see anything."

Sybill didn't look very convinced as she tried to pry into his business. When she noticed that the boy wouldn't talk any time soon, she huffed, looked back and forth between the discarded crystal ball and the uncooperative young man and when he still refused to acknowledge her she huffed again and gazed into the crystal ball herself.

Parvati and her friends stared in pure rapture as their teacher hummed in front of the transparent ball. She gasped loudly out of a sudden, surprising the students, and put a hand over her heart. "POOR BOY! THE GRIM! THE GRIM IS RUNNING INTO YOUR CRYSTAL BALL! DEATH WILL FOLLOW!"

Everyone gasped in fright and stared at James fearfully and some with pity, as if he was going to drop dead in an instant. Ron growled, as well as Dean and Seamus, who thought nothing but bullshit about this class. "Don't worry James! Trelawney likes to announce everyone's death like that! It's not true at all!" Ron tried to reassure him. Neville whimpered but still tried to support the redhead.

James looked unfazed by it all, but underneath the cheerless façade his mind was reeling. 'Death always follows me, foolish woman,' he thought sullenly.

"What a load of bull-" Seamus started angrily, but before he could finish his phrase Trelawney went rigid stiff and opened her mouth. Her voice, however, wasn't completely hers; more like a pitch higher than usual and raspy.

"He's heeere! He's heeere! The one with the killing eyes! Green! Green everywhere! The Boy-Who-Lived! Light and darkness clashing! He's heeeere!" she rasped and then coughed a couple of times.

"Oh my, what happened?" she asked stupidly and blinked when no one moved and continued to stare at her as if she was crazy.

"Um, Professor? We should really go to Dumbledore." Parvati took the woman's arm and guided her gently out of the classroom.

"Class dismissed!" was the only thing they heard as they disappeared down the stairs.

Everyone started to talk animatedly about Trelawney's weirdness and new attempt at scaring them. They even laughed about it. "That was sooo fake!" Dean scorned while Seamus mimicked what the teacher had said in a spooky voice.

Ron was grimacing in disdain. "That's the second time she does that! Can't she tell that we don't buy that crap! It's not by changing a few details of her so called prediction that she'll get us! You're lucky you're not a real student here, James! James?" Ron looked around...

James was nowhere to be found.

.....

Harry hurried it up down the corridor and ran away from the tower as fast as possible. He was looking around nervously and he was taken

with a sudden cold sweat. 'I can't believe, out of all day, that she had to make an actual prediction ABOUT ME in the bloody class! I'm lucky that no one believed that!'

He shuddered at the thought and his legs suddenly felt like jelly. He leaned on a wall and slid down, only now noticing that he had ran from the top floor to the first in only a couple of minutes, and without the use of a secret passage.

His heart was beating wildly and he took his time to breathe in deeply and try to calm himself and sort his thoughts. Nagini poked her head out of his sleeve but he didn't seem to notice at all. "Your heart iss beating too fasst, man-ssnake. I cannot resst when you are like that. What iss it that ailss you sso? Do I have to bite ssomeone?"

Harry jumped slightly. "Nagini! It'ss not wissse to sshow yourssself like thiss insside the sschool wallsss! Don't worry about me! I'll be fine. Ssomething happened in Divination classs and I wasss ssimply unprepared to hear it. I will not be caught unaware next time."

Nagini nodded her head and slid back inside the cloak.

"James?"

Harry literally held his breath and turned toward Sirius. 'Shit! Double shit! Did he hear?' He started to panic again but Sirius wasn't looking at him like he was the devil in person. It was a good sign.

"Ah! It IS you! I've been looking all over for you! What are you doing on the ground? Do you need to see Madam Pomfrey?" Sirius Black kneeled in front of the teen and gazed at him with eyes as blue as Harry's false ones. He looked concerned.

Harry shook his head and tried to smile; it was good to have Sirius looking out for him again even if this one didn't know him or trusted him completely. Harry was sure of one thing, thought: he trusted Sirius with his life, and Sirius would learn to do the same in time.

“No, I’m okay. I simply had to sit down a little to regain my breathing. I ran all the way from the Astronomy tower to here in only a couple of minutes.”

“Oh, okay then.” Sirius got up and offered his hand, which made James look at him inquiringly. Sirius smirked his oh-so-famous smirk and helped the boy to get up. “Follow me. I noticed you weren’t there at lunch and I’m pretty sure you’re hungry. I wanted to talk to you anyway. You don’t mind?”

James shook his head negatively; he didn’t seem to mind at all, on the contrary. They stopped in front of a painting of a bowl of fruit and Sirius glanced at James. “You’re not asking me what we’re doing here?” Sirius raised an eyebrow and narrowed his eyes when James stepped in front of him and tickled the pear.

“An House-Elf showed me,” Harry quickly explained and sighed silently in relief when Sirius visibly relaxed.

“Oh.”

They entered the kitchens and were suddenly assaulted by a dozen of House-Elves. “It’s Master Black! Master Black brought a friend! Is Master Black and his friend wanting something?”

Sirius laughed and told them to prepare a light supper for his guest and him; they quickly complied and James snickered when their “light” evening meal appeared. Sirius rolled his eyes over the huge feast but thanked the small Elves nonetheless. They ate in a comfortable silence where Harry sometimes stole glances in Sirius’ direction. The latter didn’t pay any heed if he ever noticed.

“What you did this morning,” Sirius started, startling James slightly, “it was kinda foolish and very daring. You’re lucky you’re only a guest because if not you would have been sent away back home.”

James snorted bleakly and looked elsewhere. “Manx deserved it. He had no right to mock Hagrid like that. Dark doesn’t necessarily mean evil but not many people understand that.”

Sirius blinked at the very mature response even though he was one of those people that, unfortunately, judged people too rapidly; in this world they had to, though, if one did not want to get stabbed in the back.

“And anyway,” James continued dejectedly, “I don’t even have a family to go back to. That’s why I stay at The Three Broomsticks.”

Sirius truly didn’t know what to do; he wasn’t used to comfort a kid with problems like James’, so he did the next best thing: he spoke about his own problems to help James know that he wasn’t alone in this world.

“You know, my Godson would be your age if he was still alive. I don’t have a family either; I don’t think I’ve ever had. The Blacks are...well they all have been Slytherins, for a start, whereas I’ve been placed in Gryffindor in my young age. They’ve always hated me and treated me as an outcast. In fact, I think that the only family I’ve ever had was Remus Lupin, James Potter, Lily Evans and my little Harry, my Godson. But Remus is the only one I’ve got left. It’s so weird but I feel as if I can relate to you because you seem to understand the hardships of life. I’ve never had any sons but if I had I would choose to have a boy just like you.”

Harry tried to hold in his tears as he listened to the heartfelt admission and barely even noticed that Sirius had omitted to mention Wormtail.

It took everything he had to keep his mouth shut, not to shout desperately that he was Harry Potter. He wanted Sirius to know so much, he wanted Sirius to treat him as a son. He wanted Sirius to talk to him late at night when he was alone, to comfort him like he just did to the personage of James Evans.

It broke Harry’s heart to lie to his Godfather but he knew it was for the best. The Death Eaters were starting to be more vicious in their attacks in the Wizarding World and if they got wind that the boy who

had attacked Malfoy and some other Death Eaters was here Hogwarts would be in for it.

He had to attack them suddenly, without any notice for this to work. Catch them unaware and trap them, even possibly kill them if he had to. He had killed already, plenty of his enemies, in fact, so he wanted Sirius to accept him like he was, a murderer, a savior, a mere boy whose past was strewn with sorrow and violence.

He wasn't all Light and laughter with no pressure on his mind and heart, and Harry knew that he would be destroyed if Sirius and Remus did not accept what he had become. But when all of this would be over and Sirius and Remus stayed with him...Harry would gladly try to laugh freely again. He would make sure that Fawkes' gift wouldn't be wasted.

"Thank you for saying that, Mr. Black. I needed to hear that. I know I'm not the best person to have around but I can't help but be the person I've been forged to become." James smiled sadly and got up.

"Dinner was excellent; please thank the House-Elves for me. I appreciate what you tried to do to cheer me up and I hope I'll also be considered as a part of the family." He laughed shakily. "I know I won't be able to come next week because of the exams and afterwards are the Christmas Holidays so if we don't see each other well...Merry Christmas."

He turned around and prepared to exit when Sirius interrupted swiftly. "Wait!"

Sirius was shaking interiorly. 'What am I doing? What is the boy doing to me? Come on Sirius! Get your act together and toughen up!' he mentally shook himself and gulped.

"I'll...I'll try to come see you next week if I can. I haven't seen Rosmerta in a while anyway. I'll try to bring Remus too. And...I'm sure Dumbledore won't mind if you come here during the Hols. Not many students stay anyway and it wouldn't be such a bother. You wouldn't be alone for Christmas! And Merlin please don't call me

Mister Black! Call me Sirius. You may still be a teenager, albeit an old one, but you're not a student. Mister Black makes me sound like my dad." Sirius tried to enliven the atmosphere up with a smile that didn't quite reach his ears because of all the rampant emotions.

James understood the message and smiled more naturally for Sirius' sake. "I'd like that. I'd like that very much. Bye!"

And he was out the door.

Sirius stayed silent and sat back down, leaning his chin on his hand pensively. "The person he's been forged to become? What did he mean by that?"

.....

Father,

The Evans boy did quite a number on our Care of Magical Creatures professor this morning. I know Manx is ready to switch sides and join us at any given moment so it may not be the best thing to have Evans hate the man. He's also very taken with the half-giant, which is completely sickening if you ask me, and although no one really noticed he also seem to have his eyes set on Lupin and Black for some reason. I don't think that he will willingly join us and trying to become his friend would be pointless and a total waste of time seeing as he is almost always surrounded by those bloody Gryffindors, Weasley in particular. On another note, I've got wind that Trelawney, that useless and pathetic Divination teacher, reacted quite bizarrely in class. She probably tried to scare the students but then again, why did she end up in the infirmary to get a check-up from Pomfrey? This is what she said, and I know that my source is exact:

He's here! He's here! The one with the killing eyes! Green! Green everywhere! The "Boy-Who-Lived!" Light and Darkness clashing! He's here!

Either that woman is completely senile or she prophesized something for the first time in her life, whatever it meant. The "Boy-Who-Lived?" I

mean, what in Grindewald's name is that? Anyway, I hope this information will be useful for our great Master.

Draco

I hope you enjoyed! (You better because I've worked my ass off for this chapter! It's 17 pages long! I've broken my record!)

And I've received reviews from people asking to continue with the letters at each end of chapter. Don't worry because I don't intend to stop them. It's a link to know that the evil side is still there while Harry is at Hogwarts.

I haven't begun writing the next chapter but it will probably be a wrap-up during the exam weeks and the Hols with Sirius and Remus. I want to concentrate on the last chapter of one of my other stories first, one entitled "Within the Chamber she Lies". I think I've made my readers wait for it a little too long. Be patient please! I never gave up on a story and I don't ever intend to!

And for those who are anxious to see when Harry will either reveal himself or be discovered, be endure the wait! It WILL happen, of course, and I already have the context of it made up in my mind. All is left is wait and read.

PLEASE REVIEW!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos ;)

Chapter 11: Tattoo

“James! Can you go to Diagon Alley for me? Ollivanders owed me yesterday because he repaired my wand,” Rosmerta said while mumbling the last part.

She had nicked her wand pretty badly three days ago and sent it to Ollivanders’ wand shop to have it repaired and polished. James had been at Hogwarts when it happened.

Harry nodded to the grumbling woman; he knew that witches and wizards always felt naked and defenseless without their wand and he knew that to have it repaired cost a lot of money. Harry wanted to help her pay for it but he still couldn’t really use his key to take money out of his vault just yet.

“Of course I’ll go Rosmerta. But won’t you need my help today? It IS Saturday.”

Rosmerta shook her head negatively and gave him a pouch of money which he put in his pocket. “Nah! There won’t be any students coming here this weekend, I know this from experience. No student in his right mind will go out right before the exam week. They need to study and practice.”

James nodded and stepped in the fireplace after throwing in the Floo Powder. “Diagon Alley!” He vanished as the green flames engulfed him.

When he reappeared (as gracefully as he could) in the Leaky Cauldron, everybody gave him the evil eye before they went back to their occupations. Tom’s gaze followed him heavily until he marched out of the back door.

Harry tapped his wand on the bricks and he walked toward his destination without looking backward. There were many people around, shopping for their Christmas gifts.

A couple of young kids not old enough to go to Hogwarts where playing together and ran in his direction. One of them accidentally pushed him on the side, making the child who had come in contact with James fall in the snow.

The sudden shove made Nagini hiss angrily and warningly, and perhaps a little too loudly.

The kids, who were in the middle of a hurried apology, froze and looked at the young man who suddenly appeared to be menacing.

Harry put a hand quickly on his stomach and cursed and winced mentally at the same time. He gave the kids an empty look and they ran away on the border of tears, no doubt to tell their parents about the strange and scary boy walking alone in Diagon Alley.

Harry didn't feel like lingering here anymore and he got the sudden urge to get this over with as soon and fast as possible. He ignored everyone looking at him suspiciously with practiced ease, his mask of indifference locked on severely.

He had to find a better way to "hide" Nagini once he came back to The Three Broomsticks; today had proved that his second familiar was too volatile to simply stay under his cloak. If it only took someone to push or hug him to get her started, he didn't dare think about what she would do to the person who maimed him with bad intentions.

He entered Ollivanders' shop and waited for the old man to show up. Harry tensed and solidified his mental wall when Ollivanders finally walked toward him. The shop owner looked at him curiously and he looked lost when he finished his examination. "Curious ..." he whispered mainly to himself. "I have never seen you around before...What can I do for you, Mister?"

James nodded his hello with a tight expression. "James Evans. I come in Rosmerta's stead to get her wand."

A light of recognition seemed to illuminate Ollivanders' eyes and he nodded, turning around to get the woman's newly polished wand. His expression was still pensive, though, as if searching in his memory the identity of the dark looking young man waiting for him. 'This boy's stance...he looks like another young man I helped find a wand from long ago...Sixty or so years ago...but that's preposterous!'

He gave the wand to James Evans while staring straight in the boy's blue eyes with his own narrowed ones. "Tell me, what kind of wand do you have?"

Harry stiffened and mentally cursed the old man's tenacity. "Frankly, that's none of your business," he answered roughly. He gave the wary man the pouch with the exact amount of money and turned to leave.

But as his hand touched the doorknob, he felt a slight pull of magic and the hundreds of small boxes stacked behind the wand-maker started to shake and vibrate, greatly startling Ollivanders. "What's happening!" the old man cried out in shock. "The wands are all resonating!"

Harry was standing in the doorway, motionless and frowning, but when he moved, barely an inch, the boxes unexpectedly fell quiet, except for a black one that hurled in his direction dangerously fast.

Thankful for his fast Quidditch reflexes he caught it before it could smack right in his face. His other hand reached his own wand in his wand holster and, as he touched it, a song echoed in the shop. Harry recognized it all too well, as well as he recognized the box he now was holding.

Ollivanders watched with wide eyes and a gaping mouth as the dark haired boy narrowed his blue orbs with determination, opened the box and took the wand out with a disturbing sentiment of familiarity.

The wand shot angry red sparks and quivered in James' hand. With blatant awe and curiosity, though it never showed on his face, Harry set the box aside and retrieved his wand, bringing both of them at eye level.

Ollivanders stuttered in awe, confusion and fear and he stumbled backward, surprised and scared probably for the first time in his life. "THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! WHERE DID YOU GET THIS WAND!" he panicked as the boy brought both magical items closer and as the Phoenix song resonated again, faster and louder.

The magical tension in the room was thick and suffocating for Ollivanders, who could only stare in horror at the two identical Phoenix feather core wands; Evans' wand, if it truly was his real name, wasn't the brother of the other but the exact same one coming from the same feather from Dumbledore's pet Phoenix Fawkes. But that was completely IM-PO-SSI-BLE!

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING!" he cried out as he found out what the glazed eyed boy was doing.

Harry didn't hear anything the white haired man shouted at him so fearfully.

The wands touched.

Ollivanders' heart almost stopped beating as fire enveloped both sticks but the boy remained unaffected by the scalding flames. Magic was literally pouring out of him but some of this magic clearly didn't come from the merging wands but from the boy himself.

It was light, it was dark, it was everywhere, dangerous and comforting...The boy was a complete living contradiction and Ollivanders wasn't so sure he wanted to know who he truly was anymore, as well as the life the boy led to get this sort of aura.

He preferred to stay aside, as far away as possible from the teen and with fearful and apprehensive eyes.

Out of a sudden, a ball of flame flared and gave the appearance of stroking the boy's right cheek and lower down the neck and chest on the right side.

In the short amount of time he felt his eyes open, Ollivanders was sure and certain that he briefly saw the boy change in both silhouette and stature and something red marking his cheek that wasn't a burn mark. But when he blinked and reopened his eyes James Evans was back to normal, as well as his magic level; but the wand-maker now knew that somehow the suffocating magic he had felt was being dampened.

The old man shook his head, trying to clear his raging thoughts. 'Did I imagine this? The young man's appearance changing and the...thing on his cheek? I am very much awake, though...'

When Harry reopened his eyes he felt the changes in his body, as if the real part of his magic had finally been unleashed; he had always felt somewhat fatigued in his younger years and at Hogwarts, maybe his magic hadn't been totally released it always pushed to get out.

It was only his thoughts about it, though, but somehow he was certain that he now also held the power of the heir of Slytherin: Tom Marvolo Riddle. Or was it his magic Tom had fed off of since the attack on Godric's Hollow? This truly was mind boggling.

When the wand finally stopped crackling in his hand and the fire receded, even Ollivanders had to stare at the new sight. Harry twirled it around expertly, scaring the old man further into the corner, and yet Ollivanders couldn't help but continue his wand gazing: the magical item was now completely changed and it was the most beautiful, if not deadly, wand he had ever seen.

Harry ignored Ollivanders to test the flexibility of his new wand. The now longer fifteen inches Phoenix core wand was completely red and so polished that it was almost giving off the impression of shining.

He holstered his new wand and turned to another source of problem: Ollivanders. Harry had felt his glamour fall for a mere second because of the rush of magic and Ollivanders had seen it, whether he believed it or not. Harry wasn't going to take any chances.

"I trust this new development will not get to Dumbledore's ears," was the subtle warning James Evans gave.

Ollivanders didn't know what to do but opted for a little bit of frowning. "Albus Dumbledore told me personally that I had to write to him as soon as the second Phoenix feather core wand was sold. Why shouldn't I?"

James almost snorted but refrained himself; he smirked in amusement instead. "Maybe because you've already warned him seven years ago? You saw the wand I held before it changed."

The shop keeper was baffled and completely lost. He sputtered "what do you mean seven years ago! I-I don't understand any of this!"

Harry sighed and looked at the befuddled man, deciding to spare him a heart attack. "I'm sorry Ollivanders but I can assure you I'm not an enemy. However, I need my secret to stay secret for a little while longer."

Ollivanders gazed at the blue eyed teen with a sigh of defeat. "You're going to obliviate me, aren't you?" he asked mutedly.

James continued to stare at him and stayed silent, the soundless warning evident enough for the old man to get.

"Fine. Maybe it's better that way anyway. But how can I know that you're on the right side and telling the truth? I need a proof or else I won't let myself be obliterated that easily. There ARE many witches and wizards outside just ready to help me if need be and I doubt you would want that kind of attention," Ollivanders threatened.

James chuckled. "You know how to bargain old man. Fine with me if it's the only way you'll leave me alone."

James approached the old wand-maker and bent above him to murmur in his ear: "I'm not from this world, yet it's in this world I will now live. My name is Harry James Potter."

Ollivanders' eyes widened to a nearly impossible size as the boy backed away and pointed his red wand at him.

He opened his mouth but the dark haired boy shook his head and gave him an apologetic look.

Ollivanders' knees buckled from under him and he shook from the shock.

"I'm sorry Ollivanders. You're a good man but nobody can know, not now. Obliviate!"

.....

"Here Rosmerta, your wand. I'm going up in my room; just call me if you need my help."

Harry all but rushed in The Three Broomsticks, gave Rosmerta her wand and jumped up the stairs, leaving the baffled woman behind, as well as a couple of customers. "What's with him all of a sudden?" asked a regular client residing in Hogsmeade.

Rosmerta merely shrugged.

Harry put the usual reinforced silencing charm around his room and tossed his heavy winter cloak aside. Nagini hissed her contentment but also her curiosity when the boy all but ran into the bathroom.

"Ssnake-child? What wass that bursst of magic I felt not too long ago? The ssong wass vaguely familiar and sscaring, at leasst for me. Wass there a Phoenix around? A Phoenix like the one who transspported uss in this world?"

No response.

"Masster?" Nagini slithered in the bathroom just as her owner slowly dropped the glamour surrounding him; the first time since they arrived.

Hedwig hooted and flew to Harry, giving her master a few pecks of recognition. "It's good to see the real me. But what did the wand do to me!"

Harry turned his face to have a closer look at the right side and fingered the tattoo, for lack of a better word. There was a face of a fire Phoenix starting in the middle of his cheek, closer to his ear, and the neck and body were trailing down his own neck and disappearing under his shirt.

Harry all but ripped the shirt off of him to gaze at the rest of the mark; the body and tail of the elaborate representation finished on the right side of his stomach. It truly was a mystifying work of art, as well as a confusing one.

Why would the wand mark him like that? Was it because it considered Harry as its true owner? Because Harry was now whole and his magic restored? Because he was a member of the Order of the Phoenix? Only Fawkes had the answer to that.

Harry restored the glamour and, luckily for him, the marking also vanished under the spell. He went back to his bedroom and sat down, taking in all these new developments. Hedwig landed on his shoulder and he petted her absentmindedly while Nagini coiled around his stomach once more. The move made Harry snap out of his daze and he watched Nagini make herself comfortable.

“Nagini, you almosst gave me away today. Can you not sstay quiet even when people touch me? You know I would call upon you if need be.”

“I apologize, masster, but it is a normal reaction for me. I would have sshown myself if I had thought you in danger, whether you called me or not. I may hide under your cloak but your sstomach iss an open target, do not forget thiss. I do not wissh to be ssquashed by someone’s sstupidity.”

Harry understood Nagini’s point of view but that didn’t help his problem. “If only there was a way to hide you better...”

Harry startled as his pocket began to glow and he retrieved his quivering wand. A green light darker than the killing curse shot out of the wand and Harry yelled as it burned something in his left arm; all

of this happened so fast that he was powerless to stop it. As soon as it started it stopped and the red wand went as back to normal as it could be.

For a minute Harry thought the burning light had traced the Dark Mark on his left arm but he was surprised to see some kind of language he had never seen. After his eyes got used to the strange symbols, he recognized it as being Parseltongue, but in written language. "I never thought Parseltongue could be written down!" Harry said with wonder.

He tried to read it and he whispered: "Sssnake."

He blinked.

"Snake? That's it? But why?"

He thought about it but when Nagini's hissing voice interrupted and asked him what the strange light had been and if he was hurt, Harry got an idea. "Nagini, can you get on my left arm?"

Nagini looked at him curiously but obeyed nonetheless. As soon as she touched the word on his arm Nagini started to literally get under his skin. It didn't hurt one bit: it's as if she was becoming a moving tattoo as she coiled around his arm.

It was a disturbing experience, though, to see his familiar moving "under" his skin. She had to coil around many times and even then, she took his entire arm's length, her head at his wrist and tail stopping just before his shoulder.

Harry panicked for a second. "Nagini, can you get out?" He held his arm up and she slowly slithered, head first and then the rest gradually, out of his skin as if detaching from it. When Nagini came out completely Harry started to breathe again, unaware that he had held his respiration.

"Nagini?" Harry started tentatively with unsure eyes, "How...How do you feel?"

The snake blinked up at him. "I feel fine, masster! Thiss wass truly a captivating experience! Your sskin kept me warm and it wassn't disssagreeable at all. Actually, I would prefer to sstay with you like thiss insstead of around your sstomach."

Harry blinked. "I think I found the way to bring you everywhere with me during the day!" The boy almost wanted to kiss his wand but he doubted that it would flare like this again any time soon. He let himself fall onto his bed with a tired sigh and fell in a light sleep with Nagini at his side.

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During the exam week Harry continued to help Rosmerta, now serving with long sleeved shirts instead of with his cloak. He had even spelled a pair of black dragonhide gauntlets to reach just below his shoulders; there were finger holes in them so Harry could move more easily in them and Nagini wasn't bothered at all by it since she preferred to stay in the dark.

When he wore the gauntlets he had to put both of them on since he didn't want people to get suspicious. After all, hiding only one's left arm was a very bad idea when everybody knew that it was the Dark Marked arm.

Xiomara Hooch had visited often during the week since the students didn't have any exams concerning the flying lessons, and she had once again bothered James about that one-on-one Quidditch match he owed her.

James had merely chuckled at her enthusiasm and told her he would play with her after the Christmas break; right now The Three Broomsticks was starting to get fuller each passing day.

Dumbledore didn't have any time to come but Sirius and a very tired looking Remus did come a couple of times, mostly when the day was over. Harry had faked a worried gaze at Remus because he didn't look healthy but both men had shrugged it off without elaborating on the matter.

Harry wasn't stupid: he had looked at the calendar and the moon was going to be full very soon.

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It was Thursday now and Harry was still working. The day was coming to an end and Harry sighed in relief. "Hey James! Just clean the table and then you can stop for today! Good job!" Rosmerta said from her place behind the bar.

James smiled slightly and nodded. He took a wet cloth and proceeded to wipe the table but as he finished he felt someone tapping on his shoulder. Turning around, he raised a surprised eyebrow at the one and only Ginny Weasley. "Ginny! What are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be at Hogwarts like everyone else?"

The girl blinked. "You know who I am?"

James narrowed his eyes because she didn't answer his question. "Of course I know who you are. Even if Ron hadn't told me about each and every member of his family then the red hair would have been a dead giveaway. Now answer my question! Did you come here alone?"

The sixteen years old girl had the decency to blush and look embarrassed. "Um...Yeah...But I'm okay!" she quickly added and blushed even more. However, when she looked shyly up at James Evans, her blush dissipated to make way for shame; he didn't look happy in the least.

"Why did you come here?"

Ginny gulped. "Well...Everyone knows you're good with your magic, at least from the little bits they've seen. Tomorrow I have the Defense against the Dark Arts exam and I was wondering if you could help me practice? I really need help in that department! I really need to be

able get stronger to duel better! You ARE good in this subject, right?" she exclaimed with a desperate voice and hopeful eyes.

James frowned and sat down, letting a sigh escape his lips. Ginny sat eagerly in front of him but her hopes started to fade as he massaged his temples while making a face.

"Defense is my best subject, Ginny, but your exam is tomorrow. I can't help you with that and you know it. And anyway, in a duel intelligence and tactics are way more important than power."

Ginny sulked deeply in her chair and crossed her arms. "I bet you're saying that to avoid helping me! Everyone knows you need to be more powerful than your opponent to win a duel!" she muttered under her breath.

Harry heard her, however, and his head snapped in her direction. He looked at her with piercing and intense eyes, which made her recoil a little from the heavy gaze.

"If this is what you have believed in all these years then here's your problem! Tell me this, Ginny: if the person you're dueling with is more powerful than you but is a complete dope, who do you think will win? Him, who duels only with power and depletes his magical reserves without a care in the world, or you, using your head to think of tactics to take him by surprise?"

Ginny opened her mouth to answer but closed it with a snap when she finally got the point.

James nodded with a somber expression. "I thought so. Believe me when I tell you that I have always dueled with this in mind."

Ginny gazed at him timidly. "And did you win often?" she asked with a small voice.

James closed his eyes and sighed again. Ginny watched as many emotions crossed his face, some looking harsher and others sadder.

“Every time...”

Ginny’s eyes widened in awe.

“But I lost things...people more important than a mere duel. You shouldn’t be hurried to fight. Merlin knows this joyous winter atmosphere won’t last for ever.”

The red head girl stayed still in an uncomfortable silence, not knowing what to say. What could she say anyway? He was completely lost in his thoughts.

“MISS WEASLEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE!”

Ginny shrieked in surprise and jumped in her seat while Harry had the natural reflex of getting his wand. He stopped short, hand still in his pocket, when he blinked and looked up to see a horrified Rosmerta gazing at Ginny. His hand left his still untested wand and he adorned a stiff position in his seat.

Ginny giggled nervously. “Ha-ha! Hum, hello Madam Rosmerta...I wanted to talk to James and-”

“And you disobeyed the rules! Now it’s dark outside and you know that Death Eaters and Dementors roam this area! Some were even spotted near Hogsmeade yesterday! How will you go back to Hogwarts now?” Rosmerta said with an angry and yet concerned frown.

Since the younger Gryffindor looked on the verge of tears, James rolled his eyes in annoyance and got up, motioning for Ginny to put her cloak back on. “Come on,” he said gruffly, “I’ll accompany you back to school.”

Ginny looked very thankful while Rosmerta transferred her worry gaze to him. “Are you sure it’s wise? James I’m worried about you. One of these days the Death Eaters will get you, if not them then the Dementors!”

James shook his head and put his cloak on. "They won't. Now come on, Ginny. It's getting late and I don't have the intention to get to bed at one in the morning."

The girl bade Rosmerta good night and James nodded to the woman before closing the door.

Rosmerta walked to a window and chewed on her lips anxiously. "Oh, I hope they'll be okay!"

Something shone upon her and her gaze transferred upward where a fully round astral shape glimmered and lit the black sky, giving it an eerie glow.

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"Come on Ginny! Can't you walk a little faster?" James asked while looking back at the girl.

Ginny was panting and trying to walk without falling in the thick snow. She was shivering. "H-how c-come you're n-not c-cold?" her teeth were practically shaking.

James rolled in eyes. "Ever heard of a warming charm?"

Of course, he wasn't about to tell her that he had done it wandlessly on himself.

The girl reddened, took out her wand, spelled herself and then sighed in relief and relaxed.

A howl resonated in the air, making both of them freeze. Ginny shrieked in fear. "Wolves?"

Harry frowned while the girl approached him out of terror and he gazed at the sky. "Oh shit." His expression turned dead serious and he grabbed the girl by the arm, not caring if he hurt her at the moment. It would hurt more if Remus found them in his transformed state.

Ginny shrieked again as James pulled her forcefully and rapidly toward the castle. Another howl echoed even nearer, making James cuss loudly. 'Shit damn fuck! Isn't Sirius supposed to force him to stay in the Shrieking Shack!'

"James! What's going on! There's a wolf following us, isn't there?" Ginny asked shakily.

"Not wolf, Werewolf. Now stay silent and hurry up!" James let out forcefully and Ginny gasped in pure panic.

The castle was now in their view but as they were almost about to leave the path the Werewolf came out of the Forbidden Forest in a jump and landed in front of them, just a couple of meters away and ready to pounce. It kept growling and showing its sharp teeth and claws.

"Ginny, when I tell you to you will run toward the castle without looking back. I'll occupy it so you'll have time to escape."

Ginny spluttered in fear and shook her head back and forth wildly. "No! No!"

Harry wanted to shake some sense and nerve into the girl but any wrong move would set the Werewolf on them both. "Do as I say!" he harshly told her and she jumped slightly. She gulped and nodded.

Ginny watched in horror as James roared and ran toward the beast, which snarled back and jumped on the boy. "GINNY NOW!"

The girl cried out when they both disappeared in the Forbidden Forest when the Werewolf pushed James on the ground but she started to run toward Hogwarts nonetheless, completely petrified by what was happening. 'I should have never gone to Hogsmeade!' Now her priority was to get the teachers if it wasn't already too late.

James wrestled with the beast that was ten times stronger than him and managed destabilize it and push it away from him for a moment.

That moment was enough for him to transform into his Animagus counterpart.

The Werewolf was busy shaking its head to see that and when it turned around it was pushed to the ground on his back while a massive black Griffin screeched a long and dangerous note, its green eyes contrasting greatly with the black feathers.

The Werewolf growled and snarled, trying to get the Griffin off of him and slashing with his claws blindly. The winged creature screeched angrily and knocked the Werewolf with a hit of his own appendage, mindful of his claws: it was still Remus in there, after all.

The werewolf fell unconscious with the strike and the Griffin turned back into a panting Harry, who had to put his glamour on again. "I'm sorry Remus."

With one last look at his poor friend he went back to Hogwarts to make sure that Ginny was safe. "At least I'll sleep well tonight..." he muttered darkly. Nagini was probably worried like crazy on his arm and unable to get out because of the thick clothing he had on.

When he opened the great doors to Hogwarts every movement in front of him stopped suddenly and he was "attacked" by a sobbing and nearly hysterical girl. "JAMES! YOU'RE OKAY! I WAS SOOO SCARED!" Ginny wailed while she hugged him tightly.

Harry was only happy that Nagini wasn't there right now.

He pried the sobbing girl off of him and lifted an eyebrow at the still stunned teachers who all had their cloak on and were ready to go outside. Sirius and Remus were absent, of course, but Dumbledore, McGonagall, Snape, Hagrid, Pomfrey and Manx were there.

"James my boy! You're all right!" Albus exclaimed in relief but gave him a concerned look. "Are you hurt somewhere? Anywhere? What happened to the Werewolf?"

Harry sighed; he knew that they were as worried for his health as Remus'. "I'm okay. A couple of bruises but nothing more. They'll be gone tomorrow. As for the Werewolf, I knocked him out with a spell."

'Liar!' his mind told him. He was almost afraid to use his new wand anyway.

The teachers looked at each other out the corner of their eyes, obviously relieved glances. Manx, however, looked disgusted. "I told you, boy! Dark creatures are dangerous and should all be eliminated!"

James snarled at him, surprising the man. "I dare you! There's a living human soul in there, you fool! It's not their fault they've been bitten or born this way! They can barely control it, if not at all!"

The other members of the faculty looked reassured to hear that from him. Albus stepped toward him. "Well, now there's no way I will let you go back to Hogsmeade alone at this hour. Poppy will check you and then Minerva will show you to the Gryffindor common room since they seem rather taken with you. I'll transfigure another bed in the bedroom Ronald Weasley and his friends occupy."

James protested as Poppy took his cloak off and she lifted an eyebrow at the long gauntlets he was wearing. "A new fashion trend I should know about?" she asked curiously.

James shrugged and stopped the nurse from taking them off. "I like them. And my arms aren't hurt. It's just my back but I told you the scrapes will be gone by tomorrow morning."

Poppy tutted but turned her attention on his back and let go of his hands, to Harry's great relief. She applied some healing salve she always took with her on his back and told Albus that he was fine.

"You were quite lucky, Mister Evans. It's not everyday that someone manages to escape a Werewolf unscathed," Severus Snape said guardedly, looking at him with narrowed, suspicious black eyes.

Harry mentally winced. Was Snape on to something?

Minerva glared at the insensitive Potions Master and whacked him on the shoulder. "Severus, be nice! The boy's had enough emotions for one night!" She turned to James with a warm smile. "Now, follow me young man. You too Miss Weasley. We will have to write to your parents about this little expedition."

Ginny winced and followed silently.

"I can't stay here Headmaster! Rosmerta is certainly waiting for me," Harry said; he could go back to the village with his Firebolt no problem, but the teachers didn't know that.

Albus shook his head, a definitive no. "Then I send an owl to her and she'll know that you are here and safe. Now follow Minerva."

Harry sighed and followed the woman quietly. "She'll kill me," he deadpanned. He kept his gaze riveted on the ground and narrowed his eyes even more at each passing minute.

They got up the moving stairs and at the second level Harry faked curiosity. "I never went in that corridor before. What's in there?"

McGonagall glanced backward at him. "There's my classroom: Transfiguration."

Ginny interrupted. "And Moaning Myrtle's lavatories!"

James raised an inquisitive eyebrow and Ginny explained; "Moaning Myrtle is a ghost! She's always crying in her cubicle so nobody goes in there. She died some fifty or so years ago in there and nobody ever knew how!"

Harry was all ears but Ginny didn't look more informed on the matter. He turned his attention on McGonagall. "So, nobody knows how she died?"

The teacher shook her head negatively and stayed silent. 'So, nobody told the students about the Chamber of Secrets...'

“I hope what happened all those years ago didn't happen again!” Harry exclaimed innocently, and McGonagall once again shook her head no. The dark haired boy was happy to hear that Tom Riddle hadn't gone back to Hogwarts to claim the Basilisk just yet. Maybe he could still have his chance to turn it on his side this time. He made a mental note to check it out at a later time.

“Here it is: the Gryffindor common room. Malfoy stinks!” Minerva rolled her eyes and James raised an amused eyebrow at the password.

Ginny snickered. “Ron chose the password this week!”

James snorted.

The portrait swung open.

“GINEVRA WEASLEY!” Ron bellowed as soon as he saw her.

Ginny grimaced as her brother's red face came centimeters from her own.

“WHERE WERE YOU! I WAS WORRIED SICK ABOUT YOU!” he shouted.

Minerva told Ron to calm down as Seamus and Dean pulled Ron away. “Mister Weasley calm down. Your sister is okay, thanks to Mister Evans. She went to Hogsmeade, for what reason is a mystery to me, and they were attacked by a Werewolf when James accompanied her back here. She's all right and James merely has some scratches. Now I want everybody in bed. Mister Evans, go with Mister Weasley. Albus probably has put the fifth bed in the room. Make yourself at home. Good night.” McGonagall turned and left.

The guys almost jumped on James. “What happened! A Werewolf! And you're still alive?”

James yawned and pushed them away, walking up the stairs. "I'm sorry but I'm tired. You have exams tomorrow so I suggest you all get some shut-eye. Good night."

Ron watched him disappear up the stairs. "How does he know the way to our dorm?" he asked the others, but they shrugged.

Seamus looked at Ginny excitedly. "Spill girl!"

Ginny was all too eager to tell them what a heroic thing James Evans had done to save her.

Harry let himself fall on the bed after he took his cloak off. There was a pajama at the end of the bed and he put the pants on, but he hesitated to put the top on. 'What if the boys see Nagini as a tattoo on my arm?' He shuddered at the thought.

Harry took the left gauntlet off and Nagini hissed her hello at him from her place beneath his skin. She started to move to separate herself from his arm when he stopped her, hissing as low as he could.

"Don't, Nagini. Not tonight. I will have to leave the gauntlet on; we are still at Hogwartss."

Nagini coiled tighter around his arm once again and let Harry put the piece of clothing back on. She didn't mind at all to stay there for the night if it prevented her master from being in trouble.

Harry pulled the covers up after muttering a wandless silencing charm. It wouldn't be as strong as one made with his wand but it would have to do for now. He didn't want to try his wand here, just in case something happened and he made something explode or whatever.

He fell asleep almost instantly while the others were still down the stairs and quite awake, listening to Ginny's tale.

Chapter 12: Emotional Holidays

Harry woke up the next day to find himself alone in the room; Ron and the others were all gone to complete their last exams.

It was around ten in the morning and he felt way better now. He put his clothes on quickly after checking on Nagini and decided to explore a bit. From his pocket he retrieved the miniaturized version of the Marauder's Map and muttered "Engorgio!" to make it come back to its original size. Luckily he only had to tap his wand on it to activate it.

"I solemnly swear that I am up to no good." Harry scanned it dutifully and was happy to notice that no one was checking the corridors, and more precisely the second floor. Filch and Mrs. Norris were patrolling the fourth floor and Snape was in his dungeons.

He left the common room and used a secret passageway to get directly on the second floor. Sighing in relief because McGonagall's classroom door was closed, he made his way to Myrtle's lavatories and located the sink that was marked the entrance of the Chamber of Secrets.

"WHO'S THERE?" a strident voice suddenly cried out and Harry winced before turning around to greet Myrtle. "You're a BOY! This is a GIRL'S lavatory! GO AWAY!"

Harry chuckled and leaned on the sink. "Hello Myrtle. How are you today?"

The ghost froze, gaped and started to wail. "Nobody ever asked me that before!"

Harry waited patiently until her wail transformed into a light sobbing.

"You're that guest boy aren't you? I like you! If I can ever do something for you just ask!"

Harry mentally smirked; Myrtle was easy to manipulate once you knew how. "Well, there's something...Professor McGonagall told me what happened to you. Not in details and how you died since nobody knows how but I'm curious. How DID you die?"

Myrtle looked delighted to be asked and giggled. "Oh, I don't really remember how since I'm a ghost and my previous memories are somewhat foggy, but it was quick and painless, let me tell you that. All I remember is seeing a pair of big bright yellow eyes...near the sink you're leaning on right now." Her expression turned grim and before Harry could speak up again she was already bawling her eyes out and flying straight toward her cubicle.

The room became quiet again.

So quiet that Harry fidgeted and decided to go to the Chamber right now instead of staying there. "Open."

The sink closed behind him when he let himself fall into the tunnel. The usual pile of bones was there as Harry recalled from his second year. He was just relieved that there was no Lockhart this time, bloody idiot.

He took off his left gauntlet as he made his way to the second locked door and Nagini was more than happy to finally be able to move freely on her master. "I vaguely recognize thiss place...It isss sssacred, isss it? But it alssso belongsss to you ssince you posssesss the late Voldemort'sss powerss and rightss."

Harry nodded, the words comforting him a little. He had no idea how the Basilisk would react at all to his presence.

He hissed again and the charmed metal snake slithered along the door to unlock it. Harry calmly gazed at the place where the Basilisk had fallen in his world after being slain by Gryffindor's sword, and consequently his hand.

He retrieved his red wand and fingered it unsurely. If something bad happened, at least his wand would be able to channel his powers better...

"I sssummon you Basilissk, from your ressting place inssside the mouth of the greatsst of the Hogwartss four!"

He vaguely heard Nagini mutter about "conceited snakeess and humanss creating ssuch a ssnobbissh passsword", and he would have quirked his lips humouredly if it wasn't for the fact that the mouth of the gigantic statue was opening to make way for the Basilisk.

"Who dissturbss me in my ssleep? A lonely human? Who are you and what do you want, rare sspeaker of the noble language of Sslytherin?"

Harry stayed on his guard and kept his eyes adverted from the glare; the Basilisk wasn't being hostile but it wasn't being very welcoming either. Curiosity dominated the loud hiss, as well as a hidden warning.

"I am here to ssstrike a deal, oh magnificent creature."

If flattery was a way to get to his goal faster then so be it.

"I would like for you to sside with me to defend your master'ss castle. Tom wantss to desstroy it and iss only ussing you for hiss own selfissh purpossess-" Harry had to stop and literally throw himself on the cold ground when the Basilisk stroke down to either bite or eat him.

"How dare you sssully the name of the heir of Ssalazar Sslytherin! Tom would never do thiss to me! Ussse me!"

It clicked in Harry's head even if his alarm blared to life: the Basilisk was in denial. It was about to strike again when, without thinking, Harry brandished his wand. "PETRIFICUS TOTALUS!"

His wand pulsated dangerously and Harry had to brace himself when the magic erupted from the glowing stick. The spell hit the Basilisk with such force that it completely petrified the creature from head to tail without any problem...and to petrify an entire Basilisk, knowing

that its scales were thick enough to repel almost any kind of magic, was a great feat indeed.

Harry looked at his wand with wide eyes and asked for the Lumos spell. Bad idea, because the light burst out and illuminated the room completely. The Boy-Who-Lived grunted and forced the magic in his body to recede little by little.

Soon he had his wand under control and could now use it without any problem when he concentrated enough.

He sighed and gazed at the frozen creature. Nagini hissed angrily in the other snake's direction. "Master, you should lock this impudent Basilisk back inside the statue! He does not deserve to stay out!"

Harry more than wanted to agree with Nagini but this wasn't a lost cause just yet. He approached the beast and stroked the scales fondly, his eyes becoming understanding and peaceful. "I know this must be difficult to accept...but he never returned to get you out, didn't he? He used you fifty years ago and when his plan failed he simply went away. He never tried to communicate with you afterward and it isn't because it's difficult. I know for a fact that if Tom truly wanted to get in Hogwarts he would easily be able to. I just want to protect this school. It's my home, as is it yours. Will you give me a chance? Finite Incantatem."

The Basilisk slowly lifted its head to stare at the boy who offered him a chance to be more useful toward Hogwarts and realized that he was somewhat right: Tom had never come back and he had been stuck in that statue for fifty years because it took a Parselmouth to open it. "What is your name, boy? I smell such mixed scents on you...You surely are the heir of Gryffindor, and yet..."

Harry smiled sadly and petted the offered head. Nagini hissed her discomfort at being so small compared to the Basilisk but the creature hissed at the familiar not to be worried.

"Right now I have a decoy name: James Evans. But my real name is Harry James Potter. I am indeed the heir of Gryffindor but

also the heir of Slytherin due to my past. I am not originally from this world. It is a very complicated story."

"Indeed."

Harry's head snapped up.

"Do not look at me like that. Your eyes show a lot even if you are in disguise. I am a magical creature, Harry. I can see more than mere humans. However your mind is well guarded so I cannot see your past. But your eyes...tell me that the other me caused you some trouble. I am profusely sorry for that."

Some darker memories resurfaced but Harry tossed them aside. Past was past. "Tom had corrupted it beyond reason. I had to kill it. But I don't like to kill creatures even if they are from the darker part of the animal reign."

"I see this now. This is why I will trust you and deny Tom."

Harry nodded thankfully and Nagini reminded him that the teachers would probably be looking for him if they weren't already. "I have to go. I will let you roam around but you have to promise me that you will not let yourself be heard or seen. I'll come by sometime. Um, what is your name, by the way?"

The Basilisk seemed to think about it. "I do not know. Tom always called me Snake. Is that a name?"

Harry snorted darkly; Tom lacked of some imagination. "Snake is not a name, it is a designation. I'll tell you what: your original owner was Slytherin and you obviously had a lot of respect for him. How about I call you Salazar?"

The Basilisk, now named Salazar, looked delighted and thanked Harry profusely for the name. Harry smiled and bid Salazar farewell and until next time, happy that he now had a powerful ally on his side, an element of surprise if things became too heated in the near future.

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Harry was roaming in the corridors when Dumbledore finally found him. "Ah James! There you are! I was wondering where you had gone when I noticed that you weren't in the Gryffindor dorm anymore. Are you lost?"

Harry put on his best fake innocent look. "I was searching for Sirius and Remus. Do you know where they are? We had plans to make for the Hols."

Albus' gaze shifted uneasily from left to right. "I'm sorry but they are somewhat indisposed right now. They are both in the Infirmary, being treated by Madam Pomfrey and I don't think they'll be in a good enough state to talk to you."

James looked so concerned for a moment that the old man sighed. "However, I was heading there right now so if you want to come with me I won't stop you. But if Poppy kicks us out I won't be responsible for the earful we will get."

James snorted and followed the headmaster. "What happened to them?"

Albus took his time to formulate the answer. "The werewolf you knocked out yesterday got to them first. They were out last night when it surprised them. Sirius and Remus made it flee but they sustained too many injuries. Poppy will get them on their feet in no time, I am sure."

James nodded silently. 'Liar.' His eyes darkened. 'But I'm also telling lies.'

Madam Pomfrey was busying around both men when Dumbledore and James finally arrived. Albus walked naturally toward the nurse, although he had a worried expression etched on his face.

Harry was rooted on the spot and stared at his Godfather and his friend.

Remus was sporting scratches almost everywhere but they weren't so bad compared to the bruise on his forehead, and Harry felt bad; he, as a Griffin, had caused this particular injury.

Sirius, however, looked far worse. He was heavily bandaged and had troubles breathing.

Harry breathed in deeply and concentrated on his Legilimency ability to filter an infinitesimal part of Sirius' memory of last night so the dog Animagus wouldn't be aware that someone had gone into his head.

What he saw made him blink a couple of times to get out of his stupor.

They had gone to the Shrieking Shack, as usual, but Sirius always locked Remus into a big cage, to the demand of the man. But yesterday the bars gave away under the particularly aggressive assault of the Werewolf. Sirius, as Padfoot, tried to stop the raging creature but the Werewolf did a number on the poor dog, as big as he is.

What was even more disconcerting was that Snape had never been able to brew something to prevent the Werewolf mentality from dominating the human part.

Wolfsbane.

‘How did they manage to keep the Werewolf at bay all these years without the Wolfsbane! Was Sirius injured more than once? It can't continue on like this! I have to do something! But...I can't just give Remus a drink regularly and tell him it's juice or something like that. They would be suspicious and maybe think I wanted to poison him...’

Harry's eyes hardened with determination and resolution as he gazed at the battered bodies of his only family. “Headmaster Dumbledore, I think it's better for me to leave. They certainly need their rest. Will you please tell them to come see me as soon as they are able to? I hope they will get better soon.”

Albus nodded, relieved that the boy had some sense of politesse. "I will tell them as soon as they feel better. Are you going back to Hogsmeade?"

James nodded and, with one last look at Sirius and Remus, he walked out of the room.

Remus groaned softly and heartbreakingly. "How? How can I continue on like this? The boy doesn't even know that I am the one who attacked him!" Remus whispered in despair and shame.

Poppy was at his side in an instant and Albus was relieved that at least Remus was awake. "What happened dear boy?" he asked softly.

Remus looked elsewhere with a suffering expression. It was hard for him and it showed. "The cage didn't hold. Padfoot tried to stop me but Moony didn't leave him a chance. He was too angry yesterday to even try to recognize Padfoot and ran away after attacking him and knocking him out. Moony wanted to be free. But...Merlin! I couldn't do anything, Albus!" Remus said shakily and closing his golden eyes tightly.

"I saw them! Miss Weasley and James! I tried so hard to tell them, to scream at them to run away, but they never heard me. James could have been killed when he charged Moony! It gave enough time for Ginny to run away but oh God! I could have killed him!"

Remus was so shaken that Poppy gave him a calming draught. Albus softly pressed him to continue his story and afterward he would be able to rest.

"He charged Moony and we fell backward into the Forbidden Forest. He was able to shove Moony away with a kick and the next thing I know Moony was being attacked by a Hippogriff...or something that resembles a Hippogriff greatly. It was so dark, but I think it was Buckbeak, or at least one of Hagrid's Hippogriffs since James seems to have an attachment to them. It was so big, so strong, that it knocked Moony out. I faintly remember hearing James' voice mumble something incomprehensible and the last thing I did was thank the

Heavens that the boy was alright before Moony lost consciousness and I saw blackness around me.”

Albus nodded thoughtfully, wondering why James had omitted to tell that some creature had helped him with the Werewolf. But the boy was obviously very tired when he finally came back so the old man let it slide. Battling a werewolf could make a person forget about the details; one was usually trying to save their life before noticing anything else around them.

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“Oy James! Are you going back to The Three Broomsticks?”

James turned around and surely, Ron and the other Gryffindors were coming his way. “Yes, I have to work at three and I don’t want to be late. Did you finish your last exam? What was it?”

Ron shrugged indifferently. “It was okay. We had Defense Against the Dark Arts this afternoon. I wonder why Professor Lupin and Black weren’t there...”

Seamus grinned. “Well anyway, I think I did pretty good! Hermione’s brain cramming session paid off this time!”

The others snickered but agreed whole-heartedly. James smiled softly as they mentioned the Ravenclaw, formerly Gryffindor in his world. The Golden Trio was no more, but at least here they weren’t dead.

“I’m glad for all of you. If you’ll excuse me.”

Ron gripped his sleeve. “Wait! I wanted to thank you for saving Ginny against the Werewolf yesterday. It was a very brave thing to do, you could have been killed,” the redhead finished with a serious expression.

James opened his mouth to reply when someone interrupted him while the Gryffindors groaned and glared at the blond boy.

“A Werewolf? You trying to save the students from dark creatures now? Or is it that you made a deal with it?” Malfoy taunted, leaning on a wall behind them. “Either way it wasn’t brave, it was foolish, trying to save someone else and putting your life in danger. Are you always there when there’s trouble? Are you the one causing it?”

Dean and Seamus glared at Malfoy while Neville tried to reason with Ron. James watched Malfoy with disdain, knowing that the blond Prefect was doing this only to rile him up; he wasn’t about to lose patience. “I wouldn’t know. Trouble usually finds me so maybe you shouldn’t stay near me; don’t want to die too young, do you?” he replied enigmatically.

Malfoy sneered and reached for his wand. Crabbe and Goyle imitated him. “Is that a threat, Evans?”

James lifted an eyebrow at the wand pointed at him and didn’t make any move to get his. “Goodbye Malfoy,” he said sarcastically.

“Have a nice Holiday on, you guys. I’ll probably see you in two weeks.”

Ron merely nodded while Malfoy growled at being ignored. “How dare you not answer me! SERPENSORTIA!”

The Gryffindors and students who had gathered around gasped in fright as a snake appeared on the floor in front of James, who merely stood there, unblinking. ‘Well this is familiar...’

“Don’t move, James! Those are dangerous!” Hermione cried out as she arrived at the same time as Malfoy cast his spell.

“Malfoy, you’re a PREFECT! Your job is to set the example and you dare attack a guest! I’ll tell it to Dumbledore!” Hermione was about to vanish the snake but Malfoy snapped at her.

“SHUT UP! Stay out of this, you MUDBLOOD!”

Hermione gasped and this time even Dean, Seamus and Neville combined had a hard time restraining Ron, maybe because they also wanted to lash out at Draco.

Harry ignored them and gazed directly in the snake's eyes. It hissed dangerously at the bickering and noisy humans but it stared back at Harry once the contact was established. Hermione cried out, making the others stop and come back to reality, when James started to step in the snake's direction.

"It's getting ready to strike, James! Don't go near it!"

But James ignored Hermione, stopped right in front of the snake, looked at it with a dark gaze and thrust his hand in the animal's direction.

Ginny shrieked, as well as some other girls, and closed her eyes. Draco watched with an eager gaze, waiting for the dark haired boy to get bitten but, strangely, the bite never came.

Everyone watched, now very suspicious, scared and shaken, as the snake slowly slithered up James' right arm, around his neck and to his left arm, making itself comfortable. Harry lifted his left arm and moved it around a little before bringing it toward his face. His darker eyes disturbed many as he cooed softly and quirked his lips almost maniacally at the creature.

"Uhhh...James?" Ron called out hesitantly, not really knowing what to make of this. "It's a snake you have around your neck and arm..."

James rolled his eyes, not once ending the connection with the snake's eyes. It was very happy to be held like this, it seems. "Your power of deduction is astounding, Ronald. Bravo."

Ron looked hurt to be spoken to this way. "B-but! I thought you liked Gryffindors! You like Hippogriffs! You can't like snakes! They're all evil! I though we were friends!" he said with conviction, throwing a nasty glare in the Slytherins' direction.

James' eyes narrowed considerable and all trace of emotion left his face. 'Tell that to Peter Pettigrew!' Harry wanted to throw back at him.

Ronald Weasley wasn't the same here as his Ron, God bless his soul.

"Not all Gryffindors are goodie-goodies, Weasley. And sometimes even a Slytherin can save a life." Harry stopped for a second and closed his eyes to think about Severus Snape.

Ron looked taken aback and disgusted by this very idea. "So that's it. You're siding with the Slytherins. I was a fool to think you were siding with the light."

Colin, who was now behind Ron, was horrified to hear this and blanched. Their eyes widened when James started to laugh at them.

"WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? You should all be on your way to the train station!" a deep voice ground out behind the students, making them jump in fright. They quickly parted to make way for Severus Snape to pass and the murderous glare made them gulp. But Snape froze and blanched when he spotted James, and more precisely the snake slithering on the boy.

"Ahh, Professor Snape! How are you?" James asked as if nothing was wrong.

Snape was quick to react. "What are you doing with that dangerous – thing- on you!" he snapped austerely, but fidgeted when the boy blinked at him and started to pet the snake fondly.

"Oh, the snake? It's a gift from Malfoy, actually."

Severus threw a glare at Malfoy, who recoiled with a wince.

"But it's a beauty isn't it?" James purred while looking at the creature lovingly. "I'll release it in the Forbidden Forest on my way back."

James walked toward Snape and brought the hissing creature at the teacher's eye level for the man to see it better.

Snape took a step back. "Don't do that!" He bit out. "Do you now how much snakes are looked down upon! They represent HIM!"

James blinked. "HIM? Ahhh," he said when he caught on. "You mean Voldemort?"

Everybody visibly flinched.

"D-don't say his name!" the Potions Master barked out.

James ignored his change of mood. "You shouldn't worry about that. I'll never side with that old maniacal murderer. Voldemort can rot in Hell for all I care."

They flinched again and wondered if the boy was insane to call the Dark Lord an 'old maniacal murderer'.

"Though, I do like dark creatures. But you already know that. Hagrid was very happy about this fact. I am, after all, quite gifted when it comes to the subject of Defense Against the Dark Arts. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go back to Hogsmeade."

Snape and the students stayed silent as he made his way through the small crowd, but he stopped when he was about to round a corner. "Oh, how impolite of me. I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. And before I forget... Ron you should really stop being so small-minded. If the idea of an evil Gryffindor appalls you so much, you should think about this: betrayal on the highest degree from a once completely light and trusted wizard can come most easily when it's a matter of power. Merlin knows I've had my share of that."

And with that last phrase of wisdom, he was out of their sight.

The corridor was silent until Snape ushered them all out of here. The Potions Master then locked himself in his private quarters and sat on his black leather couch, pouring himself a rather big glass of Brandy.

“James Evans...Who the Hell are you? The way you walk, the way you talk...”

Snape shuddered.

“You sound like the Dark Lord at times. I will be watching you. You are obviously trying to hide something very important from us. Are you with HIM?...Or are you with Albus?”

The man took a big gulp of his drink and cussed out loud. “The Werewolf and the mutt better watch out for this one. Those two dimwits trust too easily.”

He scoffed darkly. “Look how they landed with Pettigrew.”

He grimaced at the thought of the traitor. The Potions Master was a spy for Albus so he knew that HE wanted to free Pettigrew from Azkaban soon. If Black or Lupin, but especially Black, got their hands on the traitor he would not live long.

What Snape didn't know is that if Pettigrew was to escape...Sirius would not have enough time to get to him; there was someone else just waiting for this occasion to show up.

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Christmas was approaching fast for Harry. The Three Broomsticks was almost always

completely full and he had little time to put his plan into execution. He had received a

letter from Remus and Sirius, telling him that he was to come to Hogwarts on

Christmas Eve, though he was welcome at anytime he wanted.

When Rosmerta asked him to do an errand for her, he accepted without complaining. Diagon Alley was almost impossible to walk in; people were rushing in and out of the shops and didn't look where they were going.

The second time someone shoved Harry on the side he put his best glare on and was able to pass the mass of people with ease. First stop: the Magical Menagerie.

Rosmerta wanted James to buy an owl for her little nephew so he bought a young Barn Owl that would grow up to be big and strong. After giving the shop owner his money he shrank the cage and instructed the owl to stay on his shoulder.

A familiar hoot made him look up on the shop's rooftop and smile at Hedwig; she had followed him dutifully from Rosmerta's pub. He let her fly around freely but if the young owl started to get restless he would have Hedwig take care of it.

Next stop, his stop: the Apothecary. The owner looked a little less outspoken but Harry didn't need his help to find what he was looking for. He knew that he would have to go to Knockturn Alley for one of his purchases but it didn't deter his determination.

He found everything he was looking for, luckily, and brought the items up front on the counter. The old shop-keeper lifted an eyebrow at the different, and sometimes volatile, array of ingredients. "A Moonstone and Asphodel? Belladonna and Hellebore? What kind of potion do you want to brew, kid? These items don't react well with each other."

Harry scowled. "I know that! Who are you to criticize my purchases? Do I tell you how to do your job?" he snapped, and the old man quickly wrapped the items, accepted the money and gazed with wide eyes at the departing boy.

Harry breathed out once he was outside and called Hedwig to him. "Hey girl. Can you take the little one with you? Knockturn Alley is not a good place for him."

Hedwig hooted and nipped at his fingers as if telling Harry that it was also dangerous for him. She obeyed nonetheless and flew away, the Barn Owl trying to follow her as fast as it could.

The dark haired boy slipped in the shadows and entered the darkened alley. The atmosphere was very different there.

Harry had to look as dangerous as he could under his disguise and gave the cold shoulder to anyone who came too close. Old witches and wizards, looking as perfidious as they could, tried to approach him and sell him suspicious looking items.

“Well, well! What do you have here? You’re very brave, or maybe foolish, to wander in Knockturn Alley, kid. While you’re here, how about you buy this cursed rememberall?”

“Or maybe an untraceable wand?”

“Or a book that once belonged to Slytherin himself?”

They were crowding him and almost salivating at the sight of him, trying to sell him false dark items. Harry got sick of it, of them. They were getting on his nerves and trying to corner him, he knew their sick tricks.

He squared his shoulders and sneered, waving his hand in front of him.

“GET OUT OF MY WAY!” he snarled, and a wave of magic threw the untrustworthy wizards away. They all landed with a thud meters away from him and once they gathered their wits they looked at him with wide, fearful eyes and scampered away as if he was the pest.

Needless to say that nobody else blocked his way or tried to even get near him.

Harry hid the fact that he was amazed at the wandless magic he had just performed without being breathless afterward. ‘So, that’s the kind

of power my wand has to channel...No wonder why it merged with the other one.'

Harry entered the Dark Potions store and looked around; what he wanted was behind the counter. "I want the Aconite you have," he said with a firm voice.

An old, decrepit man narrowed his eyes at him but got the item nonetheless when the boy deposited the pouch of money on the counter. "Will that be all?" the shop-owner asked with a rusty voice.

Harry nodded tightly, paid the man and got out of there hastily; the air in the shop stank of the old man and the toxic ingredients.

He knew he could count on Hedwig to bring the small owl back to Hogsmeade so he apparated back into the village as soon as he could. Hedwig arrived not too long after him and Rosmerta was delighted about the small Barn Owl.

James smiled softly at her and since his shift was over he locked himself into his room and started to brew the potion that would either make people love him or get too suspicious and land him into trouble.

He had to try though. It was well worth it.

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"Hey James! We were waiting for you!" Sirius said happily once James entered the Great Hall.

There was only one table set and the students and teachers were all sitting at it, Dumbledore included. The professors welcomed James with smiles of their own but Severus merely mumbled and barely looked at him.

Sirius told the dark haired boy to ignore Snape and invited the boy to sit between Remus and himself, to Harry's internal joy.

Manx didn't even spare him a glance.

The few students who were staying at Hogwarts didn't really know what to make of his presence; the brawl between Weasley, Malfoy and he had reached everyone's ears. Sirius looked clueless and if Dumbledore knew, he faked it perfectly or simply didn't care...for the moment.

James was quick to start a conversation with Hagrid about the different magical creatures that existed and sometimes Remus threw in a comment or two. Sometime in the evening the conversation diverted to Quidditch, to Sirius and Xiomara's delight.

Hooch was eager to tell them what position James once played and she couldn't wait for that one-on-one.

"So James, what kind of broom you have?" Sirius asked while slaughtering even more his poor mashed potatoes, to Minerva's amusement.

James smiled mysteriously and took a bite out of his stew. "You'll see. But let me promise you that I'll make you eat my dust!" he teased good-naturedly.

Xiomara whined. "Stop with the mystery already! Why won't you at least tell me what kind of broom it is?"

"Yes, Mister Evans. Why must you hide so much?" Snape asked out of a sudden, trying to alarm James into talking.

Harry simply pouted and leaned his chin on his hand. "Oh, you're no fun. All right, I'll tell you the name, though I doubt that you have ever heard of it. It's a Firebolt."

He received many blinks and stares, even from Albus and Manx. "I've never heard of this kind of broom. Is it new on the market?" Albus asked curiously.

James chuckled while Sirius responded: "Not that I know of. You got me interested, James!"

The boy shrugged with a smirk and refused to answer any more of their questions.

The small party finished late and soon it was time for everyone to go to their common rooms. James was invited to stay with Sirius and Remus, who were sharing large quarters, so the boy wouldn't feel out of place in Ronald Weasley's empty dorm.

Harry had to smile softly when he entered his Godfather's rooms; everything was decorated in red and gold...typical Gryffindor.

"We've prepared a guest bedroom for you, I hope you like it," Remus said with a soft smile. He still felt guilty about the werewolf incident, and it showed.

For one of the rarest times, Harry dropped his guarded expression and smiled the brightest of smiles he could muster. "It's perfect, thank you!"

Sirius and Remus shared a glance and small smiles but they gazed at the boy with concern when his expression turned somber and he sat on a bright red leather couch.

"James? Is something wrong?" Sirius asked with concern.

James motioned for them to sit in front of him with a wave of his hand. They did as asked, curious and concerned for a moment. When James looked at them they almost recoiled at the intensity in his eyes. They had a look of hope and despair to them that no ordinary boy should ever possess.

It troubled both older men but James held his hand to stop them from talking. "Please don't interrupt me. I-" he sighed nervously. "I wanted to give you your gifts now instead of tomorrow morning. I don't want the atmosphere to be broken but if you two are to hate me for this well I rather not make myself wait and suffer in silence, waiting for the blow to come."

Sirius and Remus opened their mouth, but closed them as fast. What was the boy talking about? Why would they hate him all of a sudden? What would make James think that? Sirius urged the boy to continue nonetheless with a penetrative gaze.

James sighed shakily and retrieved two parcels from his pocket, unshrinking them with a muttered spell. Sirius and Remus lifted a surprised eyebrow; the boy had some wandless ability? They ignored this fact for the moment since their curiosity got the better of them.

“You shouldn’t have bought us anything. We were happy to invite you here,” Remus said, but the boy didn’t seem to listen. Truth to be told, they had also bought James something.

The young man first gave Sirius his gift since it wasn’t going to create any problems. The Animagus took it carefully and started to unwrap it. He was delighted when he saw the beautiful, and seemingly very expansive, cloak made of Dragonhide. It was pure black and trimmed with intricate golden embroidery.

When he unfolded it a book fell in his lap and he stared interestingly at it. James smiled softly. “I hope you like the cloak. The book, though, was kind of hard to find. It’s about Defense, of course, but there’s a rumor that it’s been written by Godric Gryffindor himself. There’s a preservation charm and Gryffindor’s signature on it.”

Sirius was awed at both items. “They must have cost a fortune! You can’t buy us such things!” Truth to be told, Sirius was truly ecstatic but how could the boy buy him such things when they barely even knew each other?

James shook his head resolutely. “I bought these things for you and only for you. It was worth the money, believe me.”

Sirius skimmed the book and finally accepted it with a grin.

Now it became more complicated.

Harry could feel his body temperature starting to heat up and his hands shook as he gave Remus his gift. As soon as Remus took it,

James bolted up the couch and walked a little farther from them, his back turned on them.

Sirius called him on it but James shook his head. Remus looked at the gift weirdly. Why had the boy bolted away from him so suddenly?

Sirius and he looked at the package guardedly but, once again, curiosity got the best of them. Sirius fingered his wand just in case something jumped in their faces, though. Each time Remus handled the box something jingled in it.

He opened it and Sirius grimaced slightly when he saw a couple of vials. Remus looked lost. "Potions? You gave Remus potions?" Sirius asked with a baffled expression.

James refused to look at them but graced them with an answer, although softly spoken it was. "It's not just any potion, Sirius. If you take it you could be gravely ill."

Sirius and Remus' eyes widened. "Are you trying to poison us!" Sirius exclaimed.

James threw the man an impatient look but his gaze softened when it landed on Remus. He turned around once again, not wanting to see their faces when he told them what the potion was for. "I said that for YOU it would be bad, Sirius. Not for Remus. The man who showed me how to do this potion...well, he's dead, so I won't take any credit for it, neither do I want to. He showed me how to brew it, and only me, so I'm the only one who knows how to do it; it's not in any potions book you'll ever find."

Remus was a little less impatient than Sirius and waited for the boy to continue. He was very interested, though. "So, what is it for?" he asked with his calm voice.

James closed his eyes. "You have drink one vial every week, preferably on the same day. Like this, Sirius will never be hurt again, nor will anybody else in the vicinity."

Sirius and Remus didn't like where this conversation was going; they blanched little by little and looked panicked. "What? What the heck are you talking about, James? What makes you think that I hurt Sirius?" Remus asked shakily while Sirius frowned at the boy.

James was quick to retaliate. "Oh, I know it's not intentional, don't worry," he said quietly. "But this potion will truly help you. The man who invented it had great intentions for it but he's dead, so...Once this war is over, I think I'll honor his name and write a book about this potion."

James finally turned toward Remus, the intensity in his eyes never diminishing. "This potion, Remus, is called Wolfsbane. Do you know why?"

Remus blanched completely and almost dropped the vials when he got up hastily and almost tripped when he stepped backward. Sirius stepped in front of his friend protectively. "Are you trying to poison him? To kill him? What do you know?" he asked harshly.

Harry recoiled slightly; hearing Sirius talk to him like that was breaking his heart, but at least Remus would feel better. "I know that Remus is a Werewolf, Sirius. Yes, I know, because you both came back all hurt the day after a full moon. It was obvious. You tried to stop him, though I don't know how, and the Werewolf got to you. Your injuries were typically Werewolf induced ones. I know that's it's Remus who almost got to me that night but I don't hold you responsible, nor will I tell anyone. I had a Werewolf friend too, you know." Harry stopped and barely noticed when his fists became white from the pressure he put on them.

Sirius and Remus stared at him, mouth agape. "How can you not blame me? How can you still want to stay near me?" Remus asked with despair.

Sirius stayed silent; it was a matter between his friend and the dark haired boy now. After a much uncomfortable silence, Remus relented and could help but ask timidly: "What...What does the potion do?..."

James smiled a sad smile at him, but a smile that promised better days, also. "You have to drink one vial per week. The Wolfsbane potion tastes like shit, as my friend so eloquently put it when he was still alive, but it's very effective since it's an ameliorated version. It enables, when the transformation is complete, the human to keep his thoughts intact and have control over the beast. It locks the beast's thoughts away so Remus would have complete control. The new version, which you now hold, also reduces the pain when a Werewolf transforms."

Remus let himself fall on the couch and tears of joy and hope made their way down his cheeks. "Oh God, Is this real?" he choked out.

Sirius was at his side in an instant and patting Remus' back reassuringly. "Can we dare hope?"

James sighed. "It's not a cure but with this potion, we're on the right track. I want all the Werewolves to benefit of this potion but I don't want Voldemort to know of it. You can tell the teachers, though, because they'll discover it soon enough. I'm going to have Snape on my back more than ever."

The boy groaned and Remus and Sirius couldn't help but laugh. It was a nervous laugh, shaky and full of emotions but happiness was laced through it.

"I never could have received a better gift. I don't know how I can ever repay you." Remus wiped his eyes with his sleeve.

James smiled. 'If you like the Wolfsbane wait until you are surprised with the appearance of Harry James Potter...'

"Merry Christmas Sirius, Remus." He merely replied.

He received a group hug and basked in the warmth of his Godfather and uncle, for lack of a better word. Sirius hurried away in his room and gave James his gift. "Since you already gave ours..." he explained joyously.

James smiled at them and opened his present. A golden ball zoomed past his face and he caught it with ease out of reflex. Sirius whistled. "Wow, Hooch wasn't kidding when she told us you were a Seeker. I'll have to bet on you when you have you match against her!"

Remus rolled his eyes and stayed silent, still shaken up by his gift and what it meant for him. He still had to feel the effect in reality but he would continue to hope for the moment.

James watched the golden ball flutter in his hand. "A snitch! Wow! Thanks!" He let the ball fly away and it flew around his head. He gazed at the package and retrieved three books; one concerning hexes and counter-curses, a second on magical creatures and the third one was about strategies during a duel.

"Those books are amazing, thank you. You can be sure that I'll read them all with rapt attention." And he was sincere about it. He had read many books about the Dark Arts and duels but some books here were different, and it thrilled him to learn more about them.

They bid each other good night and went to bed, thoroughly happy about their gifts. Harry put the silencing charm up but didn't take any chances with Nagini; she stayed on his arm all night.

Hedwig had showed up at his window so he had let her in; she was perched on the bedpost.

The Boy-Who-Lived fell asleep quickly with a satisfied smile. If Remus and Sirius were happy, that was all he needed.

Sirius was about to close the lights in his bedroom when Remus showed up and leaned against the doorframe. "Do you really think this potion will help me?" he asked timidly to his friend.

Sirius tried to be as encouraging and supportive as he could. "We can only hope, Remus. He certainly looked sure of himself. It's worth a try. Nothing like this has ever been done before. Think about the consequences it could bring if it worked! We'll show the potion to Snape first if James wants to. I just want to be sure about the

ingredients. It's not that I don't trust him but you're my best friend, Remus."

The Werewolf nodded but never looked so sure and positive in his life. "I'm certain it'll help me. This boy is not bad, Sirius. I just know it! Well, good night." He finished sheepishly when Sirius yawned loudly.

Remus went back in his room and noxed the lights. Both men fell asleep as quickly as the boy in the bedroom adjacent to theirs and for once everything was as it should be.

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"Father."

"Draco. Do you have any more news about this James Evans?"

"He's going to be a bother, father. And he insulted our Lord in front of everyone. He won't join us and he could become a problem. He is disturbing. I don't know on which side he truly is! One moment he is talking badly about our Master and the next one he is holding a snake I made appear and cooing to it as if he understood it! That's crazy!"

Lucius frowned. "I will inform our Lord. I still have some research to do about him and once I have enough evidence I will warn the minister. I'll pressure the fool to act against the boy."

Draco stopped him before he could walk away. "Are your injuries better, father?"

Lucius almost cursed him. "Do not speak of it! I'm still trying to find the little shit who calls himself the 'Boy-Who-Lived'. He will feel the wrath of the Death Eaters and Dementors once I find him!"

Draco winced and fled the room. Staying near his father when he was this incensed wasn't a good idea.

Chapter 13: Dreamscape

Albus, Minerva and Hagrid stayed silent and oddly contemplative beside Sirius, who was trying to calm the nervous Werewolf in front of him. Remus kept fidgeting and bit his lips on more than one occasion, waiting to hear the final verdict.

Harry was leaning on a wall of the potions classroom, away from them, and his expression showed that he already knew what the results would be, from the look of that smirk.

Severus Snape had never looked so concentrated and enthusiastic in his life about a potion; but this potion wasn't in any books he had ever read or written. It was a potion he simply hadn't been able to brew, no matter how many times he tried.

To know that James was fully able to master such a feat...Severus didn't know if he wanted to be angry, jealous, or simply glad that someone else had been able to brew the impossible.

He tested the potion meticulously; he smelled it, tried to determine what ingredients were in the mixture and if any of them would be toxic for Lupin. The potion was a mix of so many incompatible ingredients he was unsure of how it would affect the Werewolf; never would he have thought about such a potion.

However good it could be, Severus had some doubts: he was still too wary about James Evans but since he didn't want to start a fight with Lupin he simply kept his mouth shut about it and continued to test the Wolfsbane.

A tense two hours later, Severus sighed and lowered the fire on which the potion was sitting. Remus' breath hitched and Sirius gripped his friend's shoulders in support.

"I'm finished. This potion has got to be one of the most complex I've ever seen. Some ingredients don't even go well together but

somehow the side-effects have being dampened in this one. I really can't tell if it'll help Lupin but there's nothing in there that will kill him."

Remus let out the breath he'd been holding and looked at Sirius with a smile so wide that Sirius himself had to grin, as well as the other teachers.

"Well, that certainly is the best Christmas gift you could ever receive, Remus my boy! This was unexpected!" Albus said jovially while walking over to James, who was still standing on the side. The old man patted the dark haired boy on the back. "Now you just have to promise us that you will not tell anyone about Remus' condition."

Remus spluttered and ran to James, stopping when he stood between the Headmaster and the young guest protectively. "He already promised Albus! I believe in him!" he said with conviction.

Severus wanted to gag but refrained from grimacing at Lupin's Gryffindor tone.

Albus raised his eyebrows and chuckled. "All right, all right! I won't bother your little protégé anymore! Have a good day, everyone!" Dumbledore waved happily at the group and went back to his office. Harry knew that the headmaster was hiding his worry and suspicion with a jovial exterior. He decided he could care less at the moment.

Hagrid started to felicitate Remus heartily and Sirius approached James, who was motionless on his spot. "Hey kid, you okay?"

James blinked a couple of times and smiled up to Sirius to cover his slip-up. "Sorry, I was lost in my thoughts. What are we going to do today? The Three Broomsticks is closed for the remainder of the week since it's the Holidays. I'll be able to stay here a while longer." Truth be told, the word 'protégé' had struck a cord in Harry.

Sirius looked delighted to hear this and he invited James to join Remus, he and Hagrid for a snowball fight outside. James laughed and followed the three older men with a light spirit.

“Oy Professor!” Hagrid addressed the Potions Master, “are yeh coming?”

Snape looked positively insulted and crossed his arms, sneering at the quartet. “There is no way I will ever degrade myself to such an activity.”

Hagrid shrugged while Sirius snickered at Snape’s face. “Your loss, Snape!”

Harry glanced at Snape and their gaze crossed. The man glared a warning; James turned around.

Sirius snickered. “Forget about him, James! He’s just jealous, he’ll get over it!”

Severus was about to tell the mutt to shut up and mind his own business but the four men were already out the door. “Mangy mutt...idiots.”

.....

Overall, the rest of the holiday was spent in a calm atmosphere. Harry hadn’t always slept at Hogwarts because rare were the times when Nagini could show herself. He had gone back to see the Ashwinder a couple of times, sometimes when Hagrid was there and even when he was absent from his hut, so he could speak to the fire snake. Of course, he had wisely kept his mouth shut when Hagrid had been there with him.

Harry had also gone back to the Chamber of Secrets, as promised. The Basilisk had been more welcoming than the first time, to Harry’s relief. He had permitted Salazar to go outside by means of the numerous gigantic pipes that coursed through Hogwarts and its grounds. The boy himself had accompanied it, riding on Salazar’s back, and he had thoroughly enjoyed seeing how the Basilisk hunted its preys.

Rosmerta was delighted to see that James was actually enjoying himself instead of staying in The Three Broomsticks all day long, even if he spent his day with adults instead of kids his age. She still didn't understand him because he rarely talked about his life but she let it be; he would tell when he was ready.

But there had been a downside in all of this: it had been hard to be alone just a couple of minutes in Hogwarts. Whenever he wasn't with Sirius or Remus, there was Snape watching his back with calculating eyes, daring him to say or do something that would incite the Potions Master to raise his wand.

Harry had had to take his father's invisibility cloak to reach Myrtle's lavatories but even this was dangerous: Dumbledore had the capacity to see through it and he couldn't imagine what the old man would do if he noticed that the dark haired boy had James Potter's cloak.

Yes, overall the holiday had been enjoyable... in general. But there had to be a problem in the night between Thursday, January the second, and Friday, January the third. Only days before the return of the students. This event completely dampened Harry's mood and he had once again shunned the people around him...Sirius and Remus included.

Flashback

Harry had had a great day, thoroughly enjoyable with his ignorant Godfather and 'uncle' Remus. Snape hadn't showed up, which was a first, but maybe it was because they were in Remus and Sirius' quarters, Harry being badly beaten at wizard's chess by Remus. He had managed to beat Sirius but Remus had proved to be a better strategist than him when it concerned that game.

They had gone to bed pretty late, Sirius and Remus out like a light in mere seconds, and Harry's eyes had closed the moment his head hit the pillow...completely forgetting about the silence charm and usual nightly reinforced Occlumency wall to prevent his nightmares, the normal dose of Dreamless Sleep potion not having anymore effects on him.

He was sitting on what looked like a throne and he understood what was going on as soon as he noticed a circle of Death Eaters bowing in front of him. But Harry couldn't do anything about it than watch

“I grow tired of waiting.”

The voice was different, less raspy and more distinguished.

“ I want Wormtail to be freed from Azkaban. How are the preparations going?”

The Death Eaters fidgeted nervously at the tone of voice of their Master. “We are in the process of turning the Dementors against the ministry. Azkaban is very well guarded, though, so we are having trouble getting in,” one of the men answered shakily.

Harry felt himself getting up and losing patience. He walked around the groveling men with a glare and stopped in front of a mirror. He couldn't believe it! If he hadn't destroyed his Voldemort's body when he was a baby, this is what Tom would have really looked like while aging normally.

Neat black hair showing a start of gray combed backward, a little like Malfoy's, but short. An aristocratic face glared back at him from the reflection of the glass but what made Harry recognize Tom Marvolo Riddle was his eyes, his deep red snake-like eyes. Tom was at the point of no-return already; his soul was blackened for the rest of his life.

His entourage wasn't as decrepit as his Voldemort's had been either; no, this Voldemort was very much alive, and he didn't look as old as he was, being a wizard and all. He was what? Between sixty and seventy, for sure.

Red eyes glinted dangerously and Harry felt the hand drop to get the wand hidden in the black robes. “Idiots! You are Death Eaters! MY Death Eaters!” he growled loudly.

The servants quivered; they knew what was coming.

“And my Death Eaters do not hide themselves or operate in secret! We want the entire world to know that the mighty Lord Voldemort is about to take possession of the world! I want no pity! KILL THOSE WHO BLOCK YOUR WAY! CRUCIO!” He turned around swiftly and aimed at one of his men, making him scream and start to convulse on the floor of the stronghold.

Harry felt his scar burn and clutched at it. “Stop! Stop it Voldemort!”

Tom blinked and the spell wavered.

Voldemort narrowed his eyes dangerously then and did the contrary; he put even more power behind the spell and Harry, too proud to scream, glared determinedly and used the strongest mental wall he could muster at the moment to destabilize his nemesis, trying really hard not to grit his teeth in pain.

Voldemort felt as if his head was going to split all of a sudden and closed his eyes, hissing in pain. The spell ended and the Death Eater was released unexpectedly, though he did not move from his spot on the floor.

Tom clutched his head while the servants were all looking at him unsurely. What was going on with their Master?

“Get OUT! Get out of my head! How dare you? Who are you?” Voldemort asked out loud; he was seething, livid raging mad!

First the Death Eaters thought that their Lord was talking to them but they quickly noticed that something was wrong.

Harry was trying to hold the barrier but the Cruciatus had done its job. He wavered, but the last thing he did before ending the connection between them was to straighten and sneer in defiance at Voldemort. “It’s not over yet, Tom,” Harry mocked with a malicious smirk.

Voldemort raged at hearing his filthy muggle name and at the daring figure that had, for the first time in his life, succeeded in braking

through his barrier. He pushed with all his might and the image of the boy instantly disappeared.

...

Silence came back in his mind as he sat on his chair and panted his exhaustion.

“Master?” Bellatrix Lestrange asked cautiously, taking a step in the Lord’s direction. Voldemort’s glare made her rapidly fall back into the ranks.

The Death Eaters cried out when their mark flared to life and the burning sensation spread through their left arm. A loud POP! was then heard not seconds later and a cloaked and masked person bowed lowly. “Master, you called?”

Voldemort managed to sit back straight and his red gaze bore into the eyes of one of his most trusted servants. “Lucius. Tell me more about this boy who has caught your son’s attention.” The Lord’s voice did not betray what had happened to him minutes ago, and none of the Death Eaters were actually foolish enough to ask such a thing.

Malfoy blinked, confused why his Master would call him so urgently to know more about a mere boy but whom was he to contradict his Lord’s wishes? “As I have told you last time, his name is James Evans. Draco told me the boy could pass as –Black’s-” a sneer there, “adolescent copy: blue eyes, long black hair that reaches a little below his shoulders.”

Before the blond man could continue, however, Voldemort hissed something that sounded quite upset and incensed. “Lucius! You will research on that boy!”

Malfoy bowed with a satisfied smirk. “I have already started, my Lord. What Draco told me about him sounded too suspicious for my liking. I’m beginning to have all the proof I’ll need to pay him an ‘official visit’ at Hogwarts. May I ask, Master, why you are so suddenly interested in the boy?”

“NO, YOU MAY NOT! Go away, Lucius, before I loose patience. Go away all of you!” he snarled.

Needless to say everyone complied without asking any questions.

...

What woke up the few students who had stayed and the teachers of Hogwarts that night had been more than a little alarming and frightening, more so for Sirius and Remus who were in the same apartment as the guest of Dumbledore.

A blood curling scream of pure pain resonated throughout the entire castle in the middle of the night, awakening the majority of the population in the process.

Sirius and Remus literally fell on the floor and bolted toward James' guest bedroom, their wand raised and ready to attack any enemy. They weren't prepared to see the boy writhing and convulsing in pain and screaming as if he was under Cruciatus, though.

Sweat matted James' face as he trashed around, the bed cover no longer on the bed but thrown on the floor in disarray. Luckily for Harry, he still had his gauntlets on, being used to wearing them at all times when he was in the castle.

“JAMES! WAKE UP! Dear Merlin! What's happening to him!” Sirius panicked, trying to wake the younger man.

Remus was about to fire-call Dumbledore but the Headmaster had been too fast for him and he burst through the door, Minerva, Severus and Poppy right behind him.

They weren't prepared to see what they saw: Sirius was holding the boy down as much as he could to prevent him from hurting himself in his nightmare, if one could call it that.

Poppy shrieked “CRUCIATUS!” but how could the boy show the symptoms when there wasn’t anybody here to cast the Unforgivable?

As Dumbledore was about to try an incantation on James the screams ended abruptly and the young man shot up in bed, panting and sweating, cussing and massaging his forehead with fervor. “Son of a bitch!” he cursed as loudly as he could, which wasn’t as loud as he’s hoped to get his frustration out; his throat hurt like hell again but the problem was his scar, his bloody scar!

He felt hands trying to pry his own hands away from his forehead and he backed away, trying as much as possible to regain his senses.

Poppy huffed but each time she tried to touch him he shied away. Harry exhaled and straightened up, now completely calm, although he was still shaking inside.

“Mister Evans, get back here immediately!” Poppy Pomfrey screeched when she began to lose her patience. James ignored her and began to put his clothes on. They averted their eyes to let James put his pants on and when he put his cloak Dumbledore was fast to inquire where he was going.

“James, what happened? Where are you going at this hour?”

“I’m going back to Hogsmeade,” he rasped out, “I apologize for awakening you like this. You shouldn’t have heard that but I got careless. Please let me pass.”

Indeed, Dumbledore was blocking the doorway, his only way out. The Headmaster didn’t budge and pressed the matter even more. “Your carelessness? What are you talking about?”

James glared and avoided looking at anyone’s questioning face, mainly Sirius and Remus’ concerned ones. Said Werewolf stepped forward and was successfully able to put his hands on James’ shoulders gently. “James, what happened to you? We can’t help you if you don’t tell us what’s the problem. Why were you rubbing your

forehead so much? You should let Poppy take a look at it. I felt so much pain coming from you when you screamed...”

Harry shut his eyes tightly. ‘Damn him and his reassuring voice! Damn you, Remus! I. JUST. CAN’T...!’

James wrenched himself away from Lupin’s grasp and he looked at the man emotionlessly when he was far enough from everyone. It made Remus nervous. ‘Oh no! He’s withdrawing himself like the first time we saw him!’

“If you must know,” James whispered tightly, “My nightmares do that.”

They opened their mouths but closed them as fast in speechlessness. The nurse marched to him and before he could stop her she had pushed his fringe aside to reveal his still reddish lightning bolt scar; she went to touch it, bad move.

“Don’t touch it!” James snapped angrily, stepping backward again. He was starting to feel very cornered and he hated it.

“That scar...” Pomfrey murmured pensively.

James shot her a ‘look’. “I got this scar when I was but a baby. You can’t heal it, no one can. I hate it when people stare at it. It’s a curse scar and it makes me experience certain spells sometimes.”

Poppy blanched. “And you just felt the Cruciatus Curse didn’t you?”

The teachers also became paler and something clicked in Albus’ head. “The magic I felt you use sometimes...”

The adults looked at Dumbledore questioningly but Harry perfectly understood what the old man was implying. “It may be a part of the Dark Arts but it’s necessary for me. I had to master Occlumency...”

Minerva gasped and the Marauders’ eyes opened wider; Severus narrowed his eyes.

“What about Legilimency, Mister Evans?” Albus asked guardedly.

James jerked his head on the side and glared at nothing in particular. “It was necessary. But I don’t use it often, and certainly not against people I know are not my foes.”

Albus seemed satisfied by the answer and relaxed again. Poppy rasped her throat. “Right now I need to examine him and that scar of his Albus!”

“I don’t need your pity!” James barked irritably before shoving his way past the protesting adults. He walked as fast as he could, almost running, toward the main hall, ignoring the loud protests resonating from behind him, as well as the faces of scared students who showed up on his way.

“James stop! You have to go to the Infirmary! You just experienced the Cruciatus!”

‘Oh goodie, just yell it to the entire world, will ya?’ Harry thought crossly.

“You can’t go outside at this hour!”

James glanced backwards as he reached the double doors and opened them. The cold air chilled his bones but he was determined to get back to the village. “BUCKBEAK!” he called out stiffly and soon heard the familiar squawk approaching.

“Get back here –boy!” Snape growled dangerously but he got whacked by Sirius. “Don’t speak to him like that, you greasy git!”

“BOYS!” Dumbledore gave a warning gaze at both of them and when their attention went back to James, the boy wasn’t there anymore, but up in the air and flying away on Buckbeak.

“Oh dear, I think we’ve lost him this time...” And Albus meant that in various ways.

“What do you mean?” Sirius asked worriedly. “I’ll go see him at Hogsmeade tomorrow!” he pressed, “I’ll ask him to come back!”

Dumbledore sighed tiredly and closed his eyes. “Maybe it would be better for all of us if he didn’t come back. I knew he was hiding something big and I have the impression that his nightmares are part of this secret. I just can’t risk the students’ welfare. He lives in his own world.”

Sirius and Remus tried to deny this as vividly as they could but Snape smirked and cut them off. “I always was suspicious of the boy. I always knew he was hiding something. He was always wearing that cloak or those weird gauntlets to hide his arms. I don’t trust him...He knows things...”

“That’s complete bullshit!” Sirius exclaimed angrily. “He never did anything wrong to anyone! You have no right to accuse him like that!”

Snape sneered. “Next time he handles a snake the way he did two weeks ago I’ll tell him to see you!”

They started to bicker but stopped quickly when the headmaster told them to stop. “There’s no point staying between the doors, boys. Mister Evans won’t be coming back tonight.”

Poppy was itching to go to Hogsmeade but she followed everyone back inside to get some much needed shut-eye, even if it wouldn’t be coming easily anymore.

End Flashback

So now Harry was serving a client silently, trying NOT to think about Sirius and Remus, who had come see him not too long ago, without success since he had locked himself in his bedroom as long as they were here.

With a sad expression etched on her face, Rosmerta had to ask them to leave after two hours of begging in front of James’ bedroom door.

Harry helped another client and ignored Rosmerta's following gaze. She simply did not understand what had happened but James kept his mouth tightly closed.

.....

A week passed.

Harry was starting to get restless; he knew Voldemort was about to do something, he could feel it, he could taste the tension in the air...And he was right. The only thing he didn't know was that the Dark Lord was on a trail.

Harry sighed in frustration for the tenth time today. Rosmerta, as well as all the other customers, now kept clear of him; he was almost always frowning and ill-tempered, and his wand hand ached to be used.

He was cleaning a table when the cries of horror and screams started. The customers in the pub froze in fear as an old plump witch opened the door with a bang and hid herself in the back of the store. "DEATH EATERS! IT'S A RAID! HIDE EVERYONE!"

People started to panic and try to hide as chaos started outside; curses and hexes were thrown in each and every direction. Rosmerta was pushed toward the back of her pub as the clients tried to hide as quickly as possible. "James! JAMES!"

Harry was baffled by their cowardice but didn't lose his time by complaining at them. He took his wand swiftly from his wand-holster and ran outside, bypassing a screaming villager.

People were getting hurt; a wizard who tried to help was thrown into a nearby house by the Expelliarmus and another one suffered from a short Cruciatus.

A Death Eaters laughed and sprung behind him. Harry's eyes widened slightly but narrowed as fast; without even using his wand he

accioed a wooden bench and it hurled toward them, successfully hitting the Death Eater in the back and knocking him out.

There were three more Death Eaters, and each of them wreaking havoc in the village. Every witch and wizard in their way were either Crucioed or badly injured.

He spotted two young children all huddled in a corner but it seemed as if the Death Eaters had spotted him and followed his line of view, grinning sadistically.

Harry saw red. He ran toward the kids protectively and pointed his shiny red wand at the trio of masked servants. The two little boys behind him, barely over seven or eight years of age started to cry and beg James to protect them.

“Ha! Ha! Ha! Look what we have here! A little boy who thinks he can play hero!” One of the Death Eaters mocked maliciously.

Harry narrowed his eyes; that was the voice of Rodolphus Lestrage, husband of Bellatrix Black...the murderer of his Godfather in the other world. “Don’t come any nearer! Leave or face the consequences!”

The trio snickered and Harry sent them a glacial look.

“Ohh, I’m shaking! I’m terrified!” another mocked, and the voice proved it was none other than Antonin Dolohov...again.

Harry smirked viciously. ‘So, Dolohov’s back for more, isn’t he? I won’t disappoint him.’ He readied his wand and it started to glow dangerously.

The Death Eaters readied theirs. “You’ve got guts, kid. It’s a shame you’re against us; the Dark Lord would have welcomed you as his servant!”

Harry sneered. “I’ll never grovel to that miserable lowlife! Unlike you, who have no dignity whatsoever!”

That got them going and Harry quickly erected a shield spell to prevent being hit by the Cruciatus. The kids behind him cried out in fear and Harry realized he didn't have time to play with them behind, open for any attack; they were counting on him.

With a mighty yell he pointed his wand at them and lifted the shielding spell; "LACERO!"

It hit who Harry thought was Rodolphus and the man started to scream and writhe in pain on the snow-covered ground, the effects being amplified by the new wand.

Dolohov instantly recognized the curse he had been held under and he started to back away.

"YOU!" he bellowed and stomped his way to him, griping his arm roughly a little above his wrist, under his sleeve. Bad move. VERY bad move.

"RAHH!" He quickly let Harry go in favor of nursing his stinging hand. "Something bit me! What in Hell!" Dolohov stared at the figure of a smirking James Evans but didn't see what could have bitten him like that.

Soon enough, he and his other accomplice were hit with the same spell and they had all the difficulty in the world to crawl away and disapparate away with a loud pop, completely forgetting about their last colleague whom Harry had knocked down in front of The Three Broomsticks.

Harry sighed and thanked the Heavens that he had let Nagini coil around his middle section instead of going on his arm as a moving tattoo today. He then turned around, bending forward to check on the two shaking boys. They yelped and eyed him suspiciously but accepted his helping hand nonetheless. "Wow! That was awesome! You made them go away!" one of them said enthusiastically.

Harry didn't understand the boy's sudden energy. "Are you both okay?"

They nodded, still impressed by his imposing stance. They heard a couple of yelps and Harry swiftly turned and pointed his wand toward the source of the noise...but quickly lowered it when he noticed that Rosmerta and the other villagers were ogling nervously at the unconscious body of the Death Eater, not even daring to take the white mask off, and then staring at him.

"James!" Rosmerta shrieked and ran to him, making sure he was okay before whacking him on the back of his head. "You reckless boy! You could have been killed! I was so worried! What happened!"

The two little boys, whom their mother finally found and cried in joy because they weren't hurt, jumped up and down happily. "He made them go away! He made them scream so loud mum! They ran away!"

Everyone gaped at him and, after a few minutes of silence, they started to cheer. Rosmerta gazed at James closely and put a hand on his shoulder.

He gave her an uncomfortable look at all the attention.

"James, you can't continue on like this. You're still a child! You shouldn't be able to defeat Death Eaters, you shouldn't hang with adults like us; you should be in Hogwarts, where you finally found some pleasure in the Christmas Holidays. I know you're not completely comfortable here with me; I know you long to be at Hogwarts. I don't know what you've been through but I feel as though you think Hogwarts as your home, as crazy as it sounds. You should go." Rosmerta finished quietly.

Harry stared at her unresponsively.

Rosmerta gave him a shaky smile. "After all, you still owe Xiomara a Quidditch match! You don't want to be called a liar, don't you? Now go on! Go where your heart tells you to go!"

A tear made its way down her cheek but she smiled to him, pushing him in the right direction. Harry gave her a soft but sad smile. She laughed, trying to ease the atmosphere. "You know you're always welcome here James! And you better come see me! Now pack your things and go to Hogwarts!"

James nodded silently and, ignoring the cheers around him, he went back into his room to reduce and pack his belongings.

Unfortunately, he didn't see Lucius Malfoy grinning victoriously during the battle and disappearing away as he went in The Three Broomsticks.

"Good job Nagini. Thank you," Harry addressed his pet.

"You're very welcome, masster. But the human tassed quite nasssty."

Harry chuckled softly at his second familiar as he finished packing his things and went back outside, Hedwig following him dutifully.

.....

Xiomara sighed as she retrieved the boxes containing the game balls for the next Quidditch practice. She didn't really remember which team was supposed to practice today between Gryffindor and Slytherin, but knowing those two teams she knew that both of them would show up and start a fight eventually over who had a right to the pitch first.

She placed the heavy boxes down in the middle of the field and looked at the clear blue sky. She frowned as she felt as if she was being spied upon, turned around and blinked.

James Evans was looking right back at her with a playful grin. "Hey there! What about that one-on-one?"

Xiomara grinned widely. "You're on!"

.....

Lucius bowed submissively in front of his Master. Dolohov, Lestrangle and the third Death Eater were still having spasms in a corner and breathing heavily.

“Report, Lucius. Where is the fourth member of your party?”

Lucius looked somewhat pleased, even though one of them had been knocked out and captured. “The boy stopped him with a bit of wandless magic. He is proving to be quite a menace to your future plans. I recognize the spell he used against the others and myself perfectly. Either he is the one who calls himself the ‘Boy-Who-Lived’ or he has a connection to him. The one who previously attacked us...had deep green eyes, that’s all we’ve been able to see in the darkness. If he truly is this ‘Boy-Who-Lived’ he must be using a very strong glamour to even fool Dumbledore.”

Voldemort’s gaze swept over the most powerful members of his army and he looked down at Nagini, who hissed at him from her place below him.

“I am pleased, Lucius. Gather your most powerful allies from the ministry and go to Hogwarts. I want the true identity of this boy to be discovered in front of everyone and if he resists I want him dead. Anyone who resists Lord Voldemort shall serve as an example on how nobody should mess with me!”

Lucius bowed deeply. Antonin Dolohov gripped his sleeve before the blond man could disappear away to gather his forces. “Let me come with you. The little son-of-a-bitch dared to attack me twice! I want my revenge! I want to be there when he is brought down!” he said with conviction.

Malfoy nodded. “You will keep your hood on and act as an Auror.”

“Wait for me! I’m also coming!” another voice, feminine this time, called out, and there was only one woman in the entire army of Death Eaters: Bellatrix Lestrangle, formerly known as Bellatrix Black.

“Why do you want to come, Bellatrix? I don’t need your help,” Lucius growled.

She snickered at him spitefully. “I want to see the boy who had the power to take down some of our Lord’s most powerful servants. It’s not everyday you’re being bested by a mere child, Lucius. Getting feeble in your old age?” she mocked him.

He merely snarled at her and disappeared with a loud pop. Dolohov and Bellatrix put their hoods on and followed suite.

Mmmm... Cliffhanger. Me nasty.

So, recapitulation: Remus will test the Wolfsbane; Harry got a Voldemort induced nightmare and since there were some students in the school when it happened everyone probably knows that there was a scuffle between James and the teachers. Death Eater attacks Hogsmeade but it was only to make him get out and fight to test his competence. Xiomara is the first person Harry goes to see when he goes back to Hogwarts and Voldemort is finally acting out his plans...Watch out for Lucius...

You probably know what’s coming next...or at least have a general idea. But who knows? I can always surprise you. I do have a knack for doing that.

I hope you’ve enjoyed this entertaining little chapter of 16 pages! See you next time!

REVIEW!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos ;)

Chapter 14: The catch of the day

Last time

Xiomara placed the heavy boxes down in the middle of the field and looked at the clear blue sky. She frowned as she felt as if she was being spied upon, turned around and blinked.

James Evans was looking right back at her with a playful grin. "Hey there! What about that one-on-one?"

Xiomara grinned widely. "You're on!"

Now

"When the Headmaster told me you probably wouldn't be coming back..." Xiomara started uneasily when she stood in front of James.

The boy looked aside sadly.

"You know, when they came back from Hogsmeade and told us you had locked yourself in your bedroom until they had gone away, they were so floored and cheerless. I was also disconcerted but at the same time I wanted to go there myself and punch you, and tell you that you never held onto your promise! But...I didn't understand what had happened, I still don't, nobody does...What goes on in that head of yours..."

A gust of wind ruffled their hair playfully but neither shivered; it was a warm wind for an unusually warm day of mid-January.

"I don't feel like talking about my past," James muttered darkly, and since Xiomara felt as if she was about to loose him she put on a cheery façade and grinned roguishly.

"That's okay! Now that you're here maybe I'll finally have the challenge I was looking for! But I warn you! I was quite the Quidditch

player in my younger years! I'm not a flying instructor for nothing!" Her jovial disposition made him smile slightly.

"I'll believe it when I see it."

The woman snorted and ran to the broom shed. Harry saw her disappear inside and he was sure she was going to come out with a school broom, the "CleanSweep", but instead she came out with a light brown and polished broom, one he recognized as the Nimbus 2004 from his visits in Diagon Alley.

"A Nimbus 2004, eh? Quite a broom you've got there, but you mustn't use it very often."

She smirked at him in pride, showing off her beautiful broom. "That's where you're wrong! I practice with it almost three times a week when the students are all inside and the weather allows me to!"

James looked a bit surprised. "That often, eh? I haven't ridden my broom in a long time, I might be a little stiff. Will you give me some time to practice?"

She blew him a raspberry. "No chance!"

James chuckled. "I thought so..."

He let Xiomara open the box which held the Quaffle and the Golden Snitch and the second one, a separate one, which contained the dangerous Bludgers. While she did that he searched his pocket and found his miniaturized broom.

"Engorgio," he muttered under his breath and he watched with satisfaction as the gift from his Godfather went back to its normal size. He stared at his broom almost vehemently and with a passionate gaze. Just holding his vibrating broom made his spirit enlighten.

'Sirius...' Harry closed his eyes tightly and held the broom close like the precious gift it was.

“Woah! What kind of broom is that!”

Harry snapped back to reality and he found Xiomara to be standing right in front of him, bent down and staring with awe at the polished black broomstick that emanated an aura of power and speed.

“This is my Firebolt. I’ve won quite a number of matches with it in the past. It was gift...from someone I held dear in my heart.” The sadness in James’ voice reached the instructor and she backed away to give him some space to mount his broom.

‘I can always ask him about it after our little game. After all, I’ve never seen such a model of broomstick before; it’s quite unusual.’ Xiomara let the Golden Snitch zoom away and disappear in the sky before taking the Quaffle in her hands.

“Here’s what we’ll do: we’ll try to score in the adversary goals as many times as possible while trying to elude the Bludgers and when the Golden Snitch finally reappears we let go of the Quaffle and try to catch it before the other. Is that okay for you?”

James thought about it and nodded.

Xiomara let the Bludgers fly away and kicked the ground; Harry did the same and waited for the instructor to throw the Quaffle up in the air, concentrating on the ball. “Ready? GO!”

The Quaffle was thrown away and Harry let his instincts fly...literally. He sped away like an arrow in mere seconds, making Xiomara gape as she pushed her broom to go faster. ‘Shit! That thing’s fast! Way faster than a Nimbus 2004 at least for the starting time!’

Harry caught the Quaffle and ducked as both Bludgers hurled toward him at full speed; his Firebolt was faster, though, so he zoomed in the direction of Xiomara’s three goalposts, fully knowing that even if he had the fastest broom, she still had an advantage over him: she was well-versed in all the positions a Quidditch player could be in when he had always only been a Seeker.

A Bludger nearly hit him and he cried out slightly, slowing his broom in the process; it was enough for Xiomara to catch up with him and she smirked when she noticed that James was still focused on the Bludger and seemingly unaware that she was right below him.

She pushed the end of her broom upward and it collided with James', making the boy yelp and drop the Quaffle. She caught it and sped away as fast as possible toward James' hoops with a mocking smile. "THANK YOUUUUU!"

Harry's eye twitched and he gripped his Firebolt tightly. "Let's show her!" he smirked and proceeded to stop her from marking a point.

The instructor's heart was beating a hundred miles per hour and the rush she felt was fulfilling. Nervousness took her, though, when she glanced behind her and noticed that James wasn't there.

'Where is he?' She gulped but threw the Quaffle to goal in the center hoop. 'Yes...Yes...!'

James came out of nowhere and, as it was about to pass right through, he caught the Quaffle and shook his finger at her. "Nuh-uh!" He laughed as she pouted at him and flew above her while winking at her playfully.

She growled, now completely in the game. She was now right behind him, following him just a meter behind, trying to push her broom faster. She could almost reach him! But a Bludger came her way and she had to sway on the right to avoid being hit, scowling when she heard James whoop in joy; she knew he had scored successfully.

He flew to her and threw her the Quaffle, grinning at her scowling face. "Not fair! A Bludger nearly hit me! Plus your broom, wherever it comes from, is way faster than mine!"

James had to laugh at her childish expression. "Hey! You're the one who decided to include the Bludgers in the match! And I told you my broom was fast before, so why are you complaining about?"

She pouted while twirling the ball in her hands. "I was sure my Nimbus 2004 was faster than yours..."

James rolled his eyes. When the Bludgers whirled towards them once again they were forced to separate and restart their game.

Since his broom was faster, Xiomara had to use different tactics to get away from his grasp. He reached her, was at her side and extending his arm to touch the Quaffle nestled in her arm when she smirked and deviated swiftly on the other side, almost making her breath catch in her lungs; Harry, on the other hand, loved the thrill of the chase and was quick to follow.

However, her broom play was excellent and she kept twirling around and passing either above or below him to escape his wandering hand. He let out a soft cuss when he failed each time he tried to reach her.

She laughed in glee and threw the ball in the right hoop before he could stop it. "WHOOO!" She did a little dance on her broom, making Harry lift an amused eyebrow at her antics.

"Take that, James!" she laughed and threw him the Quaffle so they could start again.

"That was an awesome broom play, I'm impressed," James said amiably while she puffed up her chest; she was acting just like a kid and loving it.

Harry tensed and started to fly again as a Bludger flew between them. She didn't waste any time, knowing that if she slowed down he would be able to score without problem.

Thing is, he mocked her by flying left and right, up and down and around her, making Xiomara grunt and pant in effort to steer her Nimbus 2004. 'Damn, he's good.' She thought meekly but didn't give up.

She started to twirl around him as he did around her, making it look like a graceful aerial ballet. Harry was beginning to tire of this and

shot up straight high in the air. Xiomara followed dutifully and gave a push, surprising James when she grinned beside him.

He narrowed his eyes when he caught sight of a glint some thirty meters above him. The hawk eyed woman was about to steal the Quaffle away from him when he simply let it go and accelerated upward. She caught the ball with a confused expression until she saw what James was now after: the Golden Snitch.

‘He has good eyes! I wouldn’t have seen it if he hadn’t shot towards it!’ she thought, impressed.

She yelped as he suddenly stopped and now flew downward, following the golden ball which desperately tried to escape. As James flew past by her she followed suite, not letting the small Snitch out of her sight.

Their heart beat faster and faster, the wind howled around them; they didn’t see anything else around them...except both Bludgers, which they quickly evaded and then went back to their frantic, adrenaline pumping chase.

Xiomara extended one of her arms, keeping the other tightly wound around the piece of wood that allowed her to fly.

They were now side by side, a race to see who was going to catch their prize first.

The Snitch accelerated as the Pitch started to be seen and grow closer. Xiomara panted and started to sweat as she pushed her broom to its limit, but it wasn’t enough. James made her eat his dust as he finally pushed his own broom to its maximum speed of 180 miles per hour, whereas Xiomara’s could only reach 120 miles per hour.

She didn’t give up in case the Snitch decided to change direction at the last minute but it kept going down and down and down... The ground came dangerously closer and Xiomara gasped, grasped the handle of her broom and pulled up as hard as she could. “JAMES!”

she screeched as he continued to head down at full speed. "JAMES! YOU'RE GONNA CRASH!"

Harry didn't even hear her even if her voice reverberated around the entire field. Harry didn't see anything else but the Snitch and didn't hear anything else but the flutter of its pixie wings.

He completely let go of his broom handle and extended both hands ahead of him, steering the Firebolt expertly only with his Quidditch toned thighs. Harry grunted as his left hand finally closed around the Golden Snitch. A shout of warning and panic made him snap back to reality and he noticed, not so without shock, that he was going to hit the ground at full speed if he didn't pull up...right now.

Staying as relaxed as he could, he grasped his Firebolt and pulled up as sharply as he could, knowing that this wasn't the only close call he had had. He felt his broom quiver beneath him but it obeyed the command nonetheless, but not without difficulty.

Harry sighed and relaxed, looking at the fluttering ball in his hand with satisfaction as he flew mere centimeters above the snow covered ground. 'I haven't felt this free and relaxed in ages...I should have done this a long time ago.' He thought, knowing that when he played Quidditch he was in his element and could forget all of his problems.

He finally stopped and when his feet hit the snow his Firebolt became lifeless and dropped in his arms. It had never happened before and he was about to inspect his broom when he got swiftly whacked on the back of his head...two times in a row. "OW! What gives!" he snapped at the wide eyed and shocked flying instructor who was only starting to recover from the fright James gave her.

"You dolt! You almost scared me to death! You could have been killed! How careless and completely stupid to do this only for a Snitch!" she shrieked at him.

"Yeah, and he caught it and it was bloody awesome!" came a breathy reply from behind them.

They blinked and turned around; Ron was gazing at him with vehemence, apparently forgetting about the quarrel they had had before the Holidays.

The entire Gryffindor Quidditch team was here and looking at James and Madam Hooch with big eyes. Sirius was with them, staring at James and only at him, making Harry fidget. "You came back..." Sirius said cautiously, not wanting the boy to run away like the last time.

James gave him an uneasy glance but nodded in response.

Sirius sighed in relief and frowned. "Where did you learn to fly like this? What kind of broom is this? Xiomara's right; what you did was foolish, you could have hurt yourself badly."

Xiomara nodded while the Gryffindors whined at him. Ron was quick to come to James' defense. "But professor! It was bloody amazing! You have to at least admit this, as a fan of Quidditch! Man, I wish Malfoy had been here to see it!" he muttered. "He would've pissed in his pants! Your broom's even faster than the Nimbus 2004! And I know; Malfoy's dad bought some for the Slytherin team."

Ron's friends grimaced darkly at the unfairness of this. Seamus was gazing avidly at James and his broom. "Man, can't you get sorted? You could be a part of our Quidditch team! We would become unbeatable!"

James chuckled weakly. "Sorry Seamus but I don't feel like getting sorted."

'Not yet anyway,' he finished silently, 'I don't think they would like to hear that I could go in either Gryffindor or Slytherin very easily...'

He then blinked. "Speaking of Quidditch and broom...something's wrong with mine." Harry held up his lifeless Firebolt and inspected it. "It doesn't react to my call anymore. I felt it quiver dangerously when I pulled up and it simply fell when my feet touched the ground."

Xiomara let out a snort of disbelief. "That's the first time I hear of this actually happening. You pushed your broom too far from its limits and it needs to be upgraded. You simply surpassed the broom and it couldn't keep up with your demand. Unbelievable!"

The others were amazed that James could withstand such speed and ask even more, while Harry held his Firebolt close. 'I'll have to go to a Quidditch shop and ask for an upgrade kit...I won't leave my broom to anyone so I'll have to do it by myself.'

"I understand."

Xiomara nodded and put the Snitch, the Quaffle and both Bludgers in their respective boxes. "I still can't believe I've been beaten!" she muttered childishly.

Dean was at her side in moments. "Well, since James obviously doesn't want to be a part of our team, can you?" he asked with a charming and pleading voice.

Sirius chuckled while Xiomara rolled her eyes. "I'm your flying instructor, Mister Thomas, not a student. But I consider the request very flattering, thank you."

Sirius chuckled while the Gryffindors groaned and he put an arm around James' shoulders. "I must admit, James, that your flying skills are spotless. It was very entertaining to watch you two. I...I had a friend whose skills were nearly matching yours...less dangerous, of course. But..." Sirius stopped and exhaled shakily.

Harry put a hand on his Godfather's shoulder comfortingly as his eyes turned shady. "I understand, Sirius. I lost a lot of important people in my life, too."

Sirius merely nodded.

Xiomara sensed that the conversation was going astray so she rasped her throat to gain their attention. "Well, why don't we go back inside? I don't plan on staying outside all day. And anyway, the Gryffindor team has to practice."

Ron and the others didn't look so eager to play anymore and shook their head. "Nah," Seamus started, "we can wait a little longer to practice. Our next match is against the Hufflepuffs so we'll have no trouble. And it's almost time for lunch."

The others nodded and they all followed Xiomara, Sirius and James back to the castle. Ron was talking animatedly with his friends about James' and Hooch's game when said flying instructor addressed him. "Say Mister Weasley, it is rare that the Slytherin team isn't there at the same time as you. Did something happen?"

Ron shrugged. "How should I know? I don't really follow Malfoy around all day."

Xiomara hummed and pushed the doors of the castle open. The chatting group made its way to the Great Hall and noticed that they were few of the first to arrive. Albus was already there and when he noticed James he seemed surprised, yet relieved at the same time. "Ah, Mister Evans, so you decided to come back after all. Maybe with some answers as to what happened, hum?" he said with a merry voice.

James merely gave him an impassive gaze and decided to sit at the Gryffindor table; he didn't feel like dealing with this at the moment.

Xiomara grinned at him and Sirius ruffled his long hair teasingly before they walked away to the head table.

Soon enough the Great Hall started to fill up and the students were surprised to see him back.

"I wonder why he's still here...He's not a student but Dumbledore allows him to stay," whispered many children who did not understanding that Dumbledore was doing this to keep an eye on the dark haired boy.

Hermione joined her boyfriend and said an enthusiastic hello to James, who smiled back and nodded his head in return.

Midway through lunch, a shiver ran through Harry, who stopped listening to what Colin was saying to him in favor of gazing toward the doors of the Great Hall.

“James? Are you listening to me?” Colin asked, a little annoyed at being ignored. The blonde boy pouted and waved a hand vividly in front of James’ face. He gasped as his hand was quickly caught in a vice-grip, alerting some of his classmates.

James gave him a pointed look that said ‘don’t do that again’ which made Colin gulp and sulk in front of his meal. He was curious, though, as to why James kept looking so seriously in the direction of the doors, as if something was going to jump at them in any second.

Meanwhile, Harry’s hand was subconsciously inching closer toward his wand in its holster. He stole a glance in the Headmaster’s direction; the old man also had a frown on his face. ‘Did he feel it too?’ Harry asked himself, ‘the wards are being tampered with...This is not good. I shouldn’t have come back.’

“May I help you, Mr. Malfoy?”

Harry’s eyes snapped open and he came back to reality when he heard the suspicious and almost warning voice of Albus. He remained seated and decided to see how Albus would handle this one.

Lucius Malfoy smirked that infuriating smirk of his while he ordered some cloaked people accompanying him to block the exit, which now made the Headmaster retrieve his wand. The students started to panic while the teachers followed the Headmaster’s example.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you, old man. You wouldn’t want any of your precious students to get hit, do you? And anyway, I’m not here for you today.”

The students, who had inched closer to their source of comfort that was the Head Table, gazed back and forth confusedly between the seething headmaster, the powerless looking teachers and Lucius

Malfoy, Draco Malfoy's father. "What's going on, Headmaster?" A confused and slightly scared Colin asked in everyone's stance.

Dumbledore lowered his wand slightly but still held it in a tight grip. There was no answer he could give young Colin Creevey and if he made any bad move the students could get involved and hit. "What do you want, Lucius Malfoy?" he almost snarled, making the students gasp in shock; never had the Headmaster used such a hatred-filled tone of voice before.

Lucius gave him a smug and mock-filled look while he twirled his wand dangerously in his hand. Then, he gripped it tightly and his smug expression turned into a sneer. "I want the one who calls himself James Evans!" he snarled viciously.

Gasps echoed in the Hall.

Harry closed his eyes while the students' gazes bore a hole in the back of his head. 'I knew it. Might as well listen before he curses everyone... But that doesn't mean I will go down without a fight.' He mentally smirked. 'Though, to be captured now would get me directly in front of Voldemort; I wouldn't have to search for the git.'

"What do you want with James, Malfoy?" Sirius snarled at the blonde man angrily, his wand held at the ready. Remus growled.

"James! What the bloody hell are you doing! Stay here!" Ron whispered harshly while trying to hold back the dark haired boy.

James ignored him and stepped out of the sea of students, eyes set and wand out.

Malfoy's gaze swept over him calculatingly and guardedly.

"Well, well, back for more, Malfoy? I thought you had had your lesson in the Forbidden Forest," he said mockingly, yet his eyes were very stern.

Malfoy's eyes widened in recognition of the voice and his blood boiled in his veins; if his Master hadn't asked for the boy to be captured alive he would already have cast the Killing Curse, he was sure.

Dolohov also recognized the voice, as well as those who had been trapped with the Acromantulas at a later time. "You're that boy! The one who dared attack us and called himself the Boy-Who-Lived!" Dolohov snarled and his control wasn't as tight as Malfoy's. He cast the first spell in a swift motion of his arm. "Crucio!"

Scared cries reached Harry's ears but he had already evaded the spell and pointed his wand at Dolohov. "Impedimenta!" Harry proved to be faster and the dark servant was thrown backwards violently.

Chaos started and Harry had to look all around him at once. The students were all huddled behind a line of teachers and Dumbledore tried to help James as much as he could from his place of said line. "STUPEFY!" he bellowed, stunning a Death Eater who was going to attack James at the same time as another.

Sirius and Remus were cursing every Death Eater they could get their hands on and who was trying to approach James.

In the meantime, Harry was partly reliving the nightmare of the final war. "STUPEFY! LACERO!"

A Death Eater stumbled on the floor in agony as Harry let out his anger on him. Movements stopped progressively as the screams of pure torture reached the people's ears and they looked on with horror as James Evans held the curse steadily with a look of pure sadistic enjoyment. The dark grin he gave and the red glint in his eyes did nothing short of scaring everybody; he truly did resemble a dark wizard.

"What is that spell! He's going to kill him!" Filius Flitwick squeaked in horror.

They were so concentrated on the writhing servant that they didn't notice a cloaked person approaching the busy dark haired boy; however, Ron did and escaped the grasp of his panicked teachers in

favor of blindly running towards the danger. "JAMES! WATCH OUT BEHIND YOU! LET ME GO!" Ron cried out as Lucius Malfoy blocked his way and held the redhead securely and threateningly under his grip. He used Ron as a shield when James gave Lucius a glare full of hatred.

"If I were you I'd hand myself over gently before your friend gets it. Now!" Malfoy said harshly, pointing his wand on Ron's temple.

"RON!" Ginny cried out in the mass of students.

"MR. WEASLEY!" Minerva was panicking but Albus prevented her from using her wand and doing something foolish.

Harry lowered his wand and sent a glare at the cloaked person walking toward him. Ron was completely powerless in his captor's arms and he whined when Malfoy wrenched his wand away and threw it on the floor. "Now," Lucius started when the person gripped James, "throw your wand away like a good boy."

Harry let go of his shiny red wand and it rolled on the floor.

Malfoy frowned at the unusual appearance of the wand and motioned at one of his colleagues to pick it up. The cloaked man barely even touched it and the red piece of wood threw the man away in a burst of angry red magic before it simply vanished out of thin air.

"What the hell was that! Where's the wand!" the now uncovered Death Eater asked while he got up again; it was Augustus Rookwood.

Harry smirked ironically. "I thought it was your job to uncover mysteries, Rookwood. You DO work in the Department of Mysteries," James mocked. "Tell me, any new Prophecies lately? Something that would interest your Master, perhaps?"

People gasped and some students started to cry when James mentioned the Dark lord; those who didn't notice now knew that they were being attacked by Death Eaters.

Albus and his comrades frowned at the mention of the Department of Mysteries. 'How does he know about this Department of the Ministry? It's supposed to be top secret...And he mentioned a Prophecy? How does he know all of this?' Albus asked himself.

Lucius was now frowning. "Well, it looks as if we're uncovered. So why don't we take the hoods off, boys? Our Lord did tell us it wouldn't matter anymore."

Cackles resonated in the room as hoods were thrown off and shocked gasps came out of the students' mouths at each person they recognized.

The Slytherin students whose parents were present or who were Death Eaters in training quickly detached themselves from the group of scared students and joined the ranks, to the others' horror.

Draco Malfoy was part of the lot, as were Gregory Goyle and Vincent Crabbe, no surprise there. Pansy Parkinson followed with Blaise Zabini and Theodore Nott, just to name a few; a couple of Ravenclaws, Hufflepuffs and three Gryffindors also joined the ranks, which insulted McGonagall to no end.

To Dumbledore's anger, Magnus Manx also joined the group, yet Snape stayed behind on the Headmaster's side.

In the adult Death Eater rank there was Lucius Malfoy, of course, Crabbe and Goyle Senior, Bellatrix, Rabastan and Rodolphus Lestranger, Nott and Rookwood, among others.

"Speaking of uncovered, James Evans, why don't you tell us your real name? I've searched every birth record in the Ministry and no James Evans has ever come up. Plus, the only school that has been destroyed was in France, and that was five years ago. Who ARE you, boy?" Lucius asked impatiently.

The teachers and students were all ears despite the situation.

James merely sneered at him.

The blonde aristocrat growled and Rookwood, who held James, pointed his wand at the boy, which made Remus and Sirius cry out in panic.

“FINITE INCANTATUM!” Rookwood bellowed.

Harry had anticipated this move and started to mutter his glamour spell over and over again under his breath.

“James! James!” Ron started to fight Lucius’ hold so Malfoy had no choice but to stupefy the wild redhead.

Hermione was in tears; it was obvious that her boyfriend was going to be used as a shield and prisoner.

Rookwood got tired and sensed a change in the boy’s magic that would prevent him from any attempts at uncovering his true identity so he stopped his attack with the revealing spell and used his fist to knock the boy unconscious.

James winced and fell limp in the man’s grasp, but not before erecting a shielding spell on himself to prevent any attack on his unconscious person.

Rookwood smirked at Malfoy and they started to back away toward the doors. “Don’t follow us,” Lucius warned, “or else the redhead gets it.”

“No! Why don’t you let him go!” Professor Vector, the Arithmancy teacher, shouted desperately at them.

Bellatrix was the one to speak up, which made Sirius snarl in hatred at his cousin. “Our great Master wants the one who calls himself James Evans alive, so we need a scapegoat, don’t we? Personally, I don’t care about killing the Weasley boy or not.” Bellatrix smirked when Albus gave her the evil eye.

The Death Eaters escaped and apparated away as soon as they reached the apparating point outside Hogwarts’ wards.

Hermione fell on the floor with Ginny, crying their eyes out for Ron. Some students did the same but out of pure fear.

Albus gazed intently at each and every of his teachers, who looked back at him as attentively. "It's time...to tell everybody about our Order. Hogwarts will now be our Headquarter. I fear the Dark Lord will soon come out in the open."

Pending silence fell around him as the students listened frighteningly to Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore.

Remus stepped toward the solemn old man. "And what about young Mister Weasley and James Evans...or whoever he is... We can't leave them in the Dark Lord's hands! He'll kill them both! I don't know how, Albus, but the boy knows things...things that shouldn't fall in the wrong hands, I get this feeling..."

Albus nodded. "Mr. and Mrs. Weasley will have to be told when they arrive; they will be devastated, but we will do our very best to rescue them both. What we need to do now is gather our forces. Prepare the school owls! We have work to do and little time ahead of us!"

Hope you all loved this ending better! The first one wasn't up to my expectations.

Eternal Cosmos

Chapter 15: Riddle Manor

Whereas Hogwarts was still a nice and somewhat safe place to be, Little Hangleton was far from being secure at all. It had once been a nice and quiet little town but this time was long forgotten.

The snow partly covered the debris of what was left of the destroyed and burned houses in the area, making the landscape look desolate and empty and ominous. The muggles had fled this town a very long time ago and none had dared set foot there again. It was now protected with various warding spells and was called by all wizards "You-Know-Who's Headquarters", or the "Town of Death". And there was a good reason for those surnames.

Riddle Manor was indeed situated there, and Death Eaters and dark creatures roamed the land freely; being in so many a number no Auror or Unspeakable ever tried to stop them.

The Dark Lord had weaved his way slowly underground and had solidified the pact with his allies before he was going to lash out in the open. That...was the day everyone feared.

Inside Riddle Manor a knocked out dark haired boy and a stupefied redhead boy were thrown into a dark and humid cell brutally before it was locked with many powerful charms and forgotten for the moment. Cruel laughter rang through the air but the boys remained motionless, unaware of the things that were planned for them.

"Hey Nott? What do you think our Lord will do to this James Evans?" asked a hoarse voice.

"I don't have a clue, Jugson, but I bet it'll be good! I sure hope we'll be able to watch!" Nott answered.

Another Death Eater took his mask off and smirked; it was Rodolphus Lestrage. "It's a shame that our Master isn't here right now. Our

guests will have to wait. I wonder if we could have the right to play with them right now..."

Bellatrix looked back at the corridor where the cell was situated with an eager look. "Do you really think we could?"

Malfoy growled, making them shut up; he was in charge while the Dark Lord was absent. "While I would like to give that boy a piece of my mind myself, I wouldn't even think about acting on it. You know our Master claimed first dibs on him."

The others looked fairly disappointed and disgruntled. "Let's join the others and wait for His return from Azkaban," Lucius finished with his aristocratic and superior voice.

They followed dutifully.

"Do you really think He'll be able to gain the favors of the Dementors? I can't believe Pettigrew will finally join our ranks back after so many years...if he's still sane, that is..." muttered Travers to Mulciber.

Mulciber glanced at him shortly. "I don't know but I have faith in our Lord. What I'm happy about is that He'll finally come out in the open; we'll finally be revealed as our Lord's followers and directly attack Hogwarts and the Ministry since our army is great enough!"

The other servants, who somewhat heard the sadistically eager conversation, snickered gleefully. "There's nothing the old fool Dumbledore can do now!... And NOTHING and NO ONE can stop us now!"

Malicious laughter rang in the dark Manor as they joined their other comrades.

.....

His head hurt. Forget that; he was hurting all over and he was feeling groggy and pissed. Groaning, he opened his eyes and slowly sat up,

taking in his environment while he rubbed the back of his head. 'I'm in...'

His gaze fell on a patch of flaming red hair and he swore out loud. "Fuck! What is Ron doing here!"

Harry growled. 'It wasn't supposed to happen like that.' He sat down in a corner and glance at the motionless Gryffindor for a few minutes before he slowly lifted his hand up. "Ennervate."

Ron budged and moaned.

Harry lifted an eyebrow but quickly sobered up. 'Hmpf, it worked.'

Ron sat up but as soon as he noticed that he wasn't in Hogwarts anymore he started to panic and got up. "What! Where am I! Let me out!" The bars of the cell held out and Ron let out a frustrated and alarmed shout.

"Could you be even louder? Call the Death Eaters here, would you?"

Ron gasped and turned around, searching for his wand he obviously didn't have any longer. When he noticed a frowning James in the corner he slackened slightly and let himself fall on the floor; his legs couldn't support him anymore after such a fright. "Evans! They also brought you here-"

"IDIOT!"

Ron gasped and recoiled as James shouted furiously at him. "How could you have let yourself be caught like this! Foolish, irrational and typical Gryffindor behavior!"

Meant like this it was an insult but Harry caught himself and sat back in the shadows. 'I'm actually glad I'm half Gryffindor and half Slytherin...'

Ron looked insulted but his fright probably made him hold his tongue. "You sounded just like Snape...It was perturbing. How can you be so calm when we're being held as prisoners by Death Eaters with no idea of where we are?" Ron muttered after a while.

James shot him a glare but true, he did just sounded like Snape. "Nothing can really surprise me with them anymore. I've been in more terrible situations before anyway," the calm boy answered back. "And I know where we are."

Ron shot him an impressed and curious look. "Oh? Then, where ARE we?"

"Riddle Manor in Little Hangleton," was the simple answer.

Ron's eyes widened impossibly and he started to shake. "Li-Little Hangleton! We're in the Town of Death? Oh Merlin, we're dead!"

Harry ignored Ron's ranting in favor of getting lost in his thoughts. 'He seemed to recognize the name of the town but he did not react to the name of the manor? Is it possible that Voldemort's true name and status has been kept secret?'

Harry's eye twitched in annoyance when Ron started to hyperventilate and he sighed frustratingly. "Ron, why don't you sleep a little? I'll keep watch," James advised.

The other boy shook his head negatively. "No! What if a Death Eater or worse shows up!" he exclaimed.

James growled and barked out "RON! SLEEP!"

Ron felt a wave of invisible magic hit him and his legs gave out and his eyes started to drop. 'No!...That's right...Malfoy's dad he...stupefied me...And Evans don't have his wand...so...how did he break the spell?...Is he my...enemy or not?...'

Harry watched as his burst of accidental magic slowly forced Ron into a fitful sleep; it hadn't been intentional wandless magic but Harry welcomed the silence that followed. 'I guess my new wand filtrates

my magic better and allows me to control it better...I should really practice while I'm stuck here. My guess is no one will come here until Voldemort comes back from wherever he is.'

Harry started to practice a couple of easy spells like Wingardium Leviosa and Lumos just to get the hang of it. He would try other spells progressively.

"Lumos."

Uncontrolled magic bursts came out easier than controlled ones, it seemed, but a small dot of light appeared slowly at the end of his fore-finger. "What is Tom up to now? I don't like this bad feeling I'm getting..."

Needless to say, Harry practiced as hard as he could without gaining anyone's attention.

.....

His Occlumency ability was unbeatable, as well as Legilimency, it was a well-known fact. And it was now at its highest while the Death Eaters shivered behind him; he had no real happy memory, not counting the fact that he thoroughly enjoyed a good raid and merciless killing, so it prevented him from creating a Patronus; but his sheer power and impressive presence alone kept the Dementors at bay and listening to his proposition.

A dozen of bodies littered the floors of Azkaban, the human guardians of the infamous prison who had fought bravely to keep Voldemort and his followers away, but in vain.

Some Aurors were trying to get in Azkaban but there was a trolley of Death Eaters blocking their way and throwing curses at anyone who dared approach. The forces were equal, at least, and neither group seemed to have the advantage over the other.

A curse nearly hit Alastor "Mad-Eye" Moody as he was throwing a curse of his own and the auror cursed heavily. His battle-worn face

held a grim expression as he backed up Nymphadora Black, also commonly named Tonks. The young woman had a nasty gash up her arm but looked otherwise unhurt.

The commotion was suffocating for them because of the nearness of Azkaban and they were not trained to be this close to such a great number of soul-suckers; this was the job of the now probably dead guardians of the prison.

“THIS IS HELL!” Mad-Eye yelled/growled over the ear-splitting noise. “I’M SUPPOSED TO BE –INCENDIO!- RETIRED!”

Tonks dodged a curse. “-EXPELLIARMUS!- DON’T START COMPLAINING! YOU’RE THE ONE WHO ASKED TO COME BACK BECAUSE YOU WERE BORED! AND ANYWAY! WE NEED YOUR EXPERTISE –STUPEFY!- RIGHT NOW MORE THAN EVER!”

Mad-Eye pushed her out of the way of a wayward spell before he threw one back at the smirking Death Eater...who evaded it. Tonks shot him a thankful glance. “THANKS! IT’S GOOD TO KNOW YOU’RE WATCHING MY BACK!”

Mad-Eye didn’t reply and continued to throw hexes and curses away like fireballs. They started to gain some terrain on the enemy when the wasteland where they stood started to freeze and the air to thicken.

“Shit!” Tonks and Moody cursed. The aurors regrouped, Kingsley Shacklebolt being one of them.

“ RETREAT! RETREAT! ACTIVATE THE PORTKEY!” Moody shouted hurriedly and silently added “We lost Azkaban...”

Kingsley took out a quill from his pocket, tapped his wand on it, muttered “Portus, Hogwarts’ wards” and they all disappeared after they touched the item.

The Death Eaters started to cheer and call out for their successful Lord; the Dementors were now on their side and ready to be used.

Inside, all the prisoners' cells were opened and chaos spread in the prison.

Up the highest security tower, a cell opened at last. Wild and demented beady eyes looked up at the victorious figure that blocked the way. "Welcome back, my faithful servant, Wormtail."

Slight chuckles came out of the short man crouched on the humid ground, until it transformed into a full blown crazy laughter that resonated through Azkaban. "HI! HI! HE! HE! HIEH! HIEH! HA! HA! HA! HA! HA! MASTER!"

.....

Back at Hogwarts, people on the side of light kept gathering and the castle's interior was enlarged to accommodate everyone. The students couldn't go back home because of Death Eater attacks and since Hogwarts was the safest place at the moment they were staying there with their parents.

Now, everyone was being kept aware of the situation, even the students, who did not like this fact one bit.

Right now the people were in the middle of an Order reunion in the Great Hall. The students were all sitting on one side, the Order members in the front at the enlarged Head Table and the rest of the allies on the other side.

"Everyone, I hate to be the bearer of bad news," Albus started gravely, "but it is necessary to tell you that the Dementors have all fled Azkaban to follow the Dark Lord, as well as the prisoners."

This statement caused an uproar in the immense room and the sound of frightened people resonated in a cacophony of shouts and cries of pure terror. Sirius and Remus grit their teeth; this meant that the traitor was now free to roam this land.

They were brought back to reality by a weeping Molly Weasley; Arthur Weasley was seated beside his wife and trying to comfort her.

“Mum...” Charlie looked at his other brothers and sister. Percy was there, as well as Fred and George –whose normally cheery attitude was subdued- and Bill was also there, comforting Ginny who was seated at the students’ table.

“What about my son, Albus!” Molly shouted desperately. “What about Ron!”

Sirius and Remus glanced at each other worriedly. “And what about James?...”

Severus Snape closed his eyes and sighed tiredly. “I didn’t follow their call. He will be furious, but I think He was beginning to see through my spying act anyway. They’re probably being held in his Headquarters and if I dare set foot in there I’ll be killed on the spot. I know we have to get both of them back but I can’t help you there, I’m sorry. It’s like a fortress in there; a suicidal mission. What goes in...doesn’t come out.”

Silence ensued. Only Albus’ voice telling Severus that it wasn’t his fault was heard, with the exception of a few crying people, Molly and Ginny included. Mad-Eye and Tonks kept silent and nurtured their minor injuries.

.....

Harry straightened and Ron backed away when, two days after their abduction, Death Eaters finally approached their cell, cackling and grinning evilly. “So, how are the little babies holding up in there?” Snickers ran through the air that froze Ron’s blood and made Harry want to retch.

“Bellatrix, Avery, how nice of you to finally pay us a visit,” Harry greeted with a vicious sneer in their direction.

Both Death Eaters frowned at the impudent boy. “I don’t know how you seem to know all of us so well but you’ll stop acting so foolishly

brave now! HA! You'll have to answer to our Lord since he's back! Azkaban and its Dementors are ours now!" Bellatrix laughed loudly.

Ron squeaked; he knew the implications of that statement. Harry mentally scoffed. 'Big deal, it was also like this in my world...but this complicates matters; Ron won't be able to defend himself without his wand. I'll have to get him out quickly. Only two Death Eaters...' Harry evaluated the situation: he couldn't use his magic on the bars of the cells to break free so only one choice was left. He backed away beside Ron and waited as the cell was opened and both Bellatrix and Avery entered.

'Now!' Harry didn't leave them any time to react.

"OFFENSO!" The burst of magic made them stumble and land painfully on the cell's bars; both fell unconscious from the hit on the head.

Ron's mouth opened in shock, awe and slight apprehension as James stepped out of the cell and bade him to come out so he could lock the two servants in. "Listen Ron, you can rant later about the bout of wandless magic but right now we have to get out of here as soon as possible."

Ron found some courage left in his body to retort mockingly; "Oh? And how do you intent of escaping? Death Eaters are everywhere and they said that the Dark Lord was back!"

James growled at him to stop being so small-minded and discouraging. "Don't mind Voldemort-" Ron gasped but Harry ignored him, "he's MY business. Now get on my back."

Ron raised both eyebrows. "Excuse me!"

But when he looked at James for yet another witty comeback, words stuck in his throat. James Evans was now starting to change shape!

"He's...an Animagus!" Ron whispered in awe as the black Griffin replaced James' human shape. He took a few tentative steps toward

the dark looking beast and quickly got on, though uncomfortably, when the Griffin squawked at him impatiently.

Ron yelped as it started to gallop through the maze that was the Headquarters as if it knew about the way out by heart. Once they reached the Manor's main hall, Ron gulped as at least twenty Death Eaters blocked the way and cried out when they saw the huge animal with the redhead on its back.

After a few shocked gasps, curses flew like pouring rain. Ron clutched the Griffin's back tightly and tried not to be a bother as "James" dodged the attacks. The angry beast knocked them all to the floor with a few hit of his massive paws and sharp claws.

Breaking the door down, the Griffin spread its gigantic black wings and was about to fly away when a Reductor curse hit the beast directly where the right wing connected with the back of the animal, near the should-blade.

Ron screamed as he fell on the ground and the Griffin turned back into a wounded James who was clutching his right shoulder-blade and now smirking painfully at...

Ron's eyes widened in pure horror and he let out a whimper.

The Dark Lord, however, wasn't paying any attention to him but rather on the dark haired boy. "It seems as if you are full of surprises, boy. Your presence disturbs me greatly; you are a mystery just waiting to be discovered, aren't you?" said Voldemort, surprisingly very calmly, if not deadly, instead of sounding pissed just like the other Voldemort would have been.

Harry smirked sadistically at the Dark Lord, whose forces were beginning to gather; Harry could also feel the Dementors coming. "Hmpf! If you like mysteries so much, why not make this a game, Tom?"

Ron watched back and forth and wondered why the Dark Lord's face first contorted into surprise, then anger. "BOY! Do NOT call me that! How do you know of this name anyway!"

Even the Death Eaters were surprised at the tone of voice of their Master. The boy in front of Voldemort smirked and quickly transformed back. Ron took the hint hastily and got on. With a powerful flap of wings they were airborne and away from spell-reach.

A few Death Eaters were going to get their brooms to track them down but Voldemort held his arm up to stop them.

"My Lord?" Lucius Malfoy asked with the need for revenge.

Voldemort smirked to himself, completely ignoring his curious followers. "A game, huh? I like games... And when I tire of it I'll kill you myself."

.....

Harry chose to bypass the Dementors with his speed as a Griffin. Ron wasn't an Animagus, thus not immune against their power. Plus, he doubted that the whole "Animagus are immune to Dementor feeding" thing was known here; the proof was Pettigrew who had needed Voldemort to get him out.

His Griffin mind was still able to recognize the traitor who stood beside Tom, though. He hadn't given Pettigrew any attention but he mentally swore the rat would pay for his crimes. He had looked even more ruffled and insane than Sirius' twelve years in Azkaban and his twelve years as a rat in the Weasley family, but it was him.

As they were flying back to Hogwarts, a gasp from Ron brought his attention back and his mind became alert. "You're bleeding! You're losing a lot of blood!" Ron exclaimed as the red substance steadily seeped out of the wound made from the Reductor curse.

The Griffin only let out an angry screech and Ron shut up; it probably meant “tell me something I don’t know! Now shut your trap I need to stay concentrated!”

When Hogwarts finally came into view tiring hours later, nobody was happier than Ron. Harry was just glad that the wards surrounding the castle did not activate. The blood hadn’t stopped flowing, though in lesser quantity since he couldn’t stop flapping his wings, and now his eyesight was starting to blur since the spurt of adrenaline was gone.

He came short of falling on the ground but managed to land in front of the castle’s doors. Ron walked on shaky legs and gasped as James transformed back and fell, boneless, on the ground, the snow having melted.

“JAMES! No!” Ron was about to touch the injury but James pushed the hand aside weakly.

“No...Go get the adults...Sirius...Remus...” he panted before he lost consciousness.

Ron quickly acted and nearly shoved the heavy doors open. All movements and ongoing arguments stopped when the redhead suddenly ran into the Great Hall. The Gryffindor didn’t seem to notice the number of people watching him or the number of wands pointed in his direction. He even ignored his mother’s cry of “MY BABY!” and his family’s exclamations of shock and joy in order to run towards Dumbledore and the rest of the teachers.

“HEADMASTER! IT’S EVANS! HE’S JUST OUTSIDE HOGWARTS AND HE’S BADLY INJURED-”

Ron didn’t even have the time to finish his phrase and Dumbledore to stand up; Sirius and Remus were already out the door.

Needless to say that the cacophony of curious and scared voices started again as Dumbledore ordered everyone not involved to stay seated until told otherwise.

End chapter 15! Hope you liked it!

You probably all know what's going to happen next, or have a general idea of it, so I won't spoil the fun.

REVIEW!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos

Chapter 16: The clever one

A strong ward was cast at the end of the infirmary where James Evans lay after having received Poppy Pomfrey's cares. He was still very much unconscious but no one was ready to take a chance just yet until they knew what had happened and who he truly was, no matter how many times Ron assured and repeated that Evans had saved his life.

"I don't want to hear a thing, Ronald Weasley, until Madam Pomfrey takes a good look at you! My poor baby!" Molly Weasley gushed over her son like a very persistent mother hen.

"Mum!" Ron whined, but it didn't help his cause.

Poppy started her check-up while the most influential Order members talked quietly away from the redhead. "This is certainly unexpected, Albus. What are you planning to do now?" Minerva asked while stealing a glance in the youngest Weasley boy's direction.

Albus stroked his long white beard slowly. "I, for one, think that it's a miracle that both boys are here today with no more wounds to show than those of our mystery guest. I will ask Mr. Weasley to put the memories of those last two days in a Pensieve to view later. He needs his rest right now."

"Indeed he does," Poppy interrupted with a stern look.

Molly and Arthur joined them, looking more exhausted all of a sudden; the stress of thinking about a captive and probably suffering Ron was now taking its toll.

"He doesn't have any injuries. He's just tired and needs rest right now," Poppy finished with a sigh.

Albus nodded. "Why don't you take a nap Molly? Arthur? You haven't slept a wink in two days."

Molly nodded even if the prospect of leaving her son scared her. "What about the other boy, Albus? Ron did say he saved his life, even if Poppy made him drink a sleeping potion before Ron could say how," Arthur said suddenly.

Albus waved a hand dismissively. "I will take care of it. Now everyone out! The wards around James will prevent anything from happening. I will come back in an hour to talk with Ronald. His brothers and Miss Weasley must be waiting for you in the Great Hall. Minerva! You can dismiss everyone now. I think we all need a good night sleep," the Headmaster stated.

Mad-Eye stepped forward. "I will keep watch outside the Infirmary."

Sirius and Remus were about to argue when Albus shot them a look. They glanced dejectedly toward James' bed and walked out of the room silently.

The other adults gave them sorry looks and Albus sighed. "I really hope that boy isn't an enemy or else Sirius and Remus will be devastated; it will simply destroy them."

.....

Everybody was finally asleep when Dumbledore went back to the Infirmary. "I swear on the rising Phoenix."

Alastor nodded and let him pass, yawning, and he finally calculated he could go to sleep since Albus was there to take care of things.

Albus gazed at the far end of the room before he sat beside Ron's bed and shook the boy lightly to wake him up.

The redhead groaned. "Five more minutes, mum..." he mumbled in his pillow.

"I'm afraid I must insist you wake up, Mister Weasley. After, you can go back to your dormitory."

Ron's eyes snapped open and he sat up swiftly when he recognized the voice of the Headmaster. "Professor Dumbledore!"

Albus raised a hand to calm Ron and looked at the boy intently before giving him a bowl containing a shiny silver liquid. "You know what this is, don't you? You know what I want you to do?"

Ron nodded but gave the old man an alarmed look. "Headmaster! He saved my life!-"

Albus raised a hand again and Ron sighed. "Where's my wand?"

The Headmaster smiled slightly and handed him his wand, which made Ron release the breath he'd been holding. "Thanks." The boy put the tip of his wand against his temple and extracted the memories he had from his days in the cell and how they escaped and put them in the bowl. "I think that's about it."

"Thank you Mister Weasley. You can go to your dormitory now, but I must advise to keep what happened to yourself until I clear things up."

Ron nodded sadly and got up. "Headmaster? Who is he, if his name truly isn't James Evans?"

Albus sighed. "I don't know, Ronald."

Ron was about to walk out of the Infirmary when he muttered to himself, yet loud enough for Albus to hear; "I wonder why James called the Dark Lord Tom, though. HE was so pissed..." then, the boy was out and had closed the door behind him, thus missing the way the old man's head shot up in shock and surprise.

With renewed interest, he almost shoved himself in the memories.

He reappeared from the bowl three hours later with a suspicious, guarded and curious expression all at once. 'The boy could be dangerous to have as an enemy...Who is he? Why can't I read through him! I can do wandless magic, but the way he can and is

using it... And I should have seen it coming, the Animagus part... Impressive... But the part about Tom...How does he know Voldemort's real name? How does he seem to know him so much as to talk back so casually to the Dark Lord, who doesn't seem to recognize the boy?'

Albus set the Pensive aside and walked over to James' bed; he was still sleeping very soundly, the heavy bandage apparent on his back and shoulder.

He spent a good deal of time just staring at the puzzle in front of him. The boy's appearance suddenly unnerved him to the point of making him glare at nothing in particular.

"Finite Incantatum," he tried calmly, even if he knew, somehow, that it wouldn't be that easy.

Albus sighed and was perturbed that he was unable to pass through a simple boy's defenses. He plopped a Lemon Drop in his mouth.

"Revelo!" He tried something else determinedly, not wanting to give up. Nothing.

Albus growled. "Accio Marauder's Map!"

His impatience was thinning as the map landed in his hands, the treasured possession of Sirius and Remus, very useful for the Order members. "I solemnly swear I am up to no good."

The pictures slowly appeared on the yellowed map and the old man tapped his wand on the word "Infirmary".

He frowned at the map, then at the boy, then back at the map. Albus Dumbledore showed up, Poppy Pomfrey, whose quarters were nearby, showed up, but the bed in front of him...was empty.

Nothing.

No other name, as if the boy didn't even exist. His eyebrows shot up and disappeared under his violet nightcap. "Now this is utterly disturbing..."

Albus stayed seated beside the enigmatic boy all night long, just staring at the sleeping figure as if the mystery was about to evaporate at any moment.

.....

Relieved stares followed Ron the next morning when he entered the busy Great Hall flanked by nearly all the Gryffindor Seventh years. Ginny and Hermione were each clinging on one of his arms, to Ron's annoyance, and his friends kept asking him questions about what had happened; Ron refused to answer, per Dumbledore's request, even if he was dying to say it.

Percy, Bill, Charlie, Fred, George and his parents all glomped him, making it look like an invasion of redheads. "Ronnykins!" Molly gushed over her son, which made people snicker about the nickname and Ron's eyes widen in horror.

"MuUuM!" he whined, "don't talk to me like that in front of the whole population!"

Molly put a hand over her mouth and she blushed. "Sorry Ron..."

Fred and George swatted their brother on the back as a sign of affection. "Happy to have you back in one piece, little bro!"

Ron smiled at them and nodded, also greeting the three other brothers.

"So Ronnykins," Seamus started tauntingly with a joyful snicker, "are you finally going to tell us what happened?"

Everyone was looking at him, making Ron really nervous. He opened his mouth but sighed in relief when Dumbledore entered the Great Hall, saving him from the stares. "He will not because I asked him not

to. Until I know more about him I don't want to see anyone near the Infirmary."

People started to mumble and argue but Albus held his ground and changed the subject for the moment. Sirius and Remus were particularly sullen at not being kept aware of James' condition but sat down silently nonetheless at the long Head Table.

"So, what'd I miss?" Ron chirped to lighten the atmosphere.

His friends looked at him, then all around them. "After you were captured, the Headmaster announced that the Order of the Phoenix, a group that was secret and created by him, would at long last come out in the open and act. Since the Dark Lord has decided to gather his forces, Dumbledore has deemed Hogwarts the only safe place to stay, and with good reason: its wards are some of the strongest in Great Britain beaten only by Gringotts'," Hermione provided helpfully.

Ron shot her a thankful look and also gazed around him. "So, that's why everyone's joining us here. Hogwarts has become a Headquarter for the side of Light."

Hermione nodded and took a bite out of her breakfast, even if her stomach grumbled against it. "I really miss my classes! All we do is sit here and listen to their reunions and possible combat strategies all day long! Stupid war! Stupid Dark Lord!"

Some Gryffindors gasped and Ron dropped his toast in favor of staring wide eyed at her. "Hermione!"

She shot him an annoyed look. "What! Tell me you don't prefer classes over this hell we don't have anything to do with in the first place!"

Ron snorted and admitted she had a point. "James seems to have something to do with it, though," Ron muttered darkly, his head bent over his plate.

Curious gazes looked his way. "What do you mean?" Colin questioned.

Ron sighed and glanced at the Head Table where Dumbledore was having a conversation with his father and Kingsley Shacklebolt. "I can't tell you everything...but we escaped because James is an Animagus, and a bloody brilliant one at that! He's a black Griffin and I actually got to ride his back!"

His friends were impressed. "But we almost got caught; that's when James was wounded by the Reductor curse. HE was there, you guys! HE could have killed us so easily...but James started to talk to him...so casually! So daringly! HE was furious! But...he let us go..."

The Gryffindors around him and those listening to the hushed conversation gaped in horror.

"James actually TALKED with him! You actually SAW him!" Seamus asked, his face a mix between fear, awe and curiosity.

Ron shuddered as an answer and his friends started to talk animatedly, and so loudly between each other that the people in the Great hall progressively started to stop talking to pay more attention to them.

"What's going on over here?" Minerva McGonagall walked over to them and gave them one of her strict looks. "We can't concentrate at the Head Table with all of your interactions."

"But professor McGonagall!" Neville said, trying to get his friends out of trouble, "James Evans and Ron SAW Him! James Evans even talked with Him! And he's an Animagus!"

Minerva startled. "Who! The Dark Lord?"

Ron was going to answer when Dumbledore rasped his throat. "Seeing as our young Mister Weasley is unable to keep a secret even from his friends," the old man started and Ron bent his head and reddened in shame, "I might as well tell you all this little bit of information. Ronald has indeed been saved by Mister Evans," Molly sucked in a sharp breath, "because James Evans used this hidden

ability of his to escape.” Dumbledore paused and gave a pointed look at the confused Remus.

“It seems he is a black Griffin, and an unregistered one at that.”

While this piece of information gave them something new to gossip on, Remus and Sirius locked gazes and their eyes widened in realization. “So...it was him...in the forest that night!” the Werewolf said with a soft voice.

“That form of Animagus...with one well-placed hit he could have killed the Werewolf...you, that night! But he didn’t...”

“Why did he spare me? The monster in me?” Remus whispered.

Sirius glanced at his friend, the respect he had for the boy growing at each passing moment even if most of the people here would point their wand on him given a chance.

“Well, whoever or whatever he is I won’t leave the Infirmary unguarded anymore. Alastor will debrief me; for now I’m going to guard the room,” Kingsley said with a wary voice.

Sirius and Remus immediately wanted to protest but Albus once again shot them a look and both men sat down reluctantly. Seeing their unsure expressions, Albus’ strict eyes softened and he called out to Auror Shacklebolt; “Kingsley! When he wakes up don’t push him around. I’m sure if you’re being okay with him he will return the favor and voluntarily follow you. I think he will know we all seek some answers. We’ll be here.”

Shacklebolt nodded with a light grimace before disappearing down the corridor. Albus sighed tiredly when the sound of gossip finally reached his ears and gave him a migraine. “Merlin, I’m too old for this...SILENCE!”

He might be old, but his voice still had the desired result of quickly shutting people off. “That’s better. Now, let’s get down to our next agenda, shall we?”

.....

The sun set, the sun rose.

The sun set, the sun rose.

The sun set, the sun rose again...

The Infirmary doors saw many witches and wizards guarding the dark haired boy, yet it's only on the third day that James Evans finally gave sign of being alive.

Harry groaned; he had the sunlight straight in his face. He wanted to just go back to sleep but he felt a ward activate and his habit made him sit up in the bed at a break-neck speed, only to wince when he saw stars and felt the painful soreness in his upper-back. 'I'm back at Hogwarts, that's right, I remember now.'

The Infirmary door was almost shoved open when the ward went off and it was Kingsley Shacklebolt who ran into the room. "So, our mystery boy is finally awake, huh? It was about damn time!" the auror said gruffly.

Harry lifted an eyebrow when he saw the Order member but didn't let anything else show on his face. "Auror Shacklebolt," he greeted simply, making the older man's eyes twitch.

"How do you know my name, kid? I've never met you." Then, the man snorted before "James" could even open his mouth. "I guess it doesn't matter now since the whole army of the Light is waiting for you in the Great Hall; you have some answers to give us, kid, and be careful if they're wrong," Kingsley warned him.

Harry mentally groaned at his bad luck but got up silently and followed obediently. 'I guess it would have happened sooner or later anyway; might as well be now,' the black haired boy concluded. 'But the thing is: will I be able to accept them, knowing that they are not the ones I knew? And will they accept ME as I am?'

Lost in his thoughts, Harry didn't see the suspicious glance Kingsley gave him, as well as the shiver that ran through the man's spine at Harry's emotionless face. 'That boy is weird...His magical aura is...confusing...addictive, even powerful...' Without even being aware of it, the auror was gripping his wand so tightly it could've broken.

Harry's eyes widened when he saw the number of people and numerous familiar faces in the crowd. "Dumbledore! Sleeping Beauty has finally awakened!"

All heads turned their way and every sound dissipated into thin air. Harry silently cursed at Shackbolt.

Albus got up from his seat. "Well now, I think it's finally time to have some answers, don't you think?"

There was an undertone in the Headmaster's voice that Harry suddenly didn't like, as if he could be held at wand-point at anytime; he did NOT like to feel threatened, but squelched his anger for the moment.

"It may be, but may I have something to eat, at least? I haven't eaten in quite a while," he replied somewhat coldly and had every right to: it was true.

Severus was about to shout at the boy to stop fumbling around and get to the point but Sirius interrupted the irritated Potions Master. "Of course you can! Take a seat wherever you like and the house-elves will make something for you!"

Snape shot Sirius a dirty look but the dog Animagus either didn't notice or simply didn't care.

Many more people were angered by Sirius' lack of judgment but kept their mouth closed; Sirius Black, when angered, wasn't a man to be trifled with.

Ron quickly bid James to sit beside him even if the others were reluctant to let him. A light meal appeared when he sat down and

Harry sighed before he started to eat, still aware of the immense number of eyes locked on him. 'I miss Dobby...'

He was apparently taking too much time to eat because halfway through his meal Severus banged his hand on the table, making quite a few people yelp and jump. "That's. IT! We've been too lenient with you, boy! MUCH too lenient! WHO ARE YOU?" In a spur of anger, the ex-spy pointed his wand menacingly in the boy's direction, much to Sirius' and Remus' anger.

"SNAPE! What the hell do you think you're doing!" Sirius shouted but was interrupted by James, who sighed and deposited his fork on his plate.

"Ever the impatient and suspicious one aren't you, Severus Snape? You're still the same here, that's good to know."

The Potions Master blinked in wariness and puzzlement. "What are you talking about, boy?"

Harry shook his head in dismay. "If you're all so worried then let me just say this: I swear on my mother's sacrifice."

Albus and the other Order members raised their eyebrows in bafflement. "How- how do you?" stuttered Minerva, and James smirked slightly.

"How do I know the password of reconnaissance of the Order of the Phoenix? Quite simple. I know everything about it since I, myself, am a member of it."

Albus frowned. "I do not recall initiating you. You have to receive a special feather to be welcomed among us. Who are you to claim such a thing?"

Harry sighed. "You mean a feather from Fawkes? Don't look so surprised, Headmaster; of course I received it, if only contained in another form. But Fawkes is dead, so the other also gave me its

feather, the very same one; it was very hard to control at first, but I got the hang of it.”

Now everyone was confused by the boy’s words.

“Fawkes isn’t dead! A Phoenix can’t die! Are you crazy, boy?” Snape asked, seriously doubting the boy’s sanity. Even Ron and his friends had backed away from him, eyeing him weirdly.

James chuckled sadly. “Fawkes...”

A fire lit in front of the now standing boy, alerting the people who panicked slightly; but Dumbledore perfectly recognized this fire.

Fawkes appeared seconds later after being summoned by someone who wasn’t its master, and James offered his right arm for the Phoenix to lean on. Fawkes thrilled softly in recognition and happiness while James cooed at it and petted the shining creature. “Hey Fawkes, long time no see, old friend. I’m sorry it took so long to call you. You have my wand, do you not?”

Fawkes gave the impression of nodding before he thrust his leg at him; gripped within the claws was a shiny red wand and James took it with a thankful look and a small smile. “I missed you, Fawkes. I miss them all so much...but they’re all dead. I should have been the only casualty in the war, but everybody sacrificed their lives for me,” Harry said, his voice full of hidden emotions threatening to spill, and Fawkes cried a tear for him, further surprising the Headmaster.

Harry smiled softly at bid Fawkes goodbye as the bird vanished back into the highest office in the castle.

Something clicked in Dumbledore’s head and he sat down heavily in his chair, making some of the teachers look at him confusedly. “Is it possible? Alternate dimensions?”

James smirked at him. “So you finally got it.” Then, he sobered up. “It was Fawkes who sent me here. Everyone I loved had died, so what

did I have to loose? I had the chance to see you all again, but it's a shame that, even here, my parents didn't survive."

He gave a pointed look at the shaking Remus and Sirius and said softly; "But at least you're still here, Padfoot and Moony."

"Oh Merlin!" Remus breathed, very much aware that his knees were threatening to give up. Sirius couldn't bare the pressure and did sit down.

It didn't appear like it, but Harry was as nervous, if not more, as them. But he had to be strong and he straightened his façade. He lowered his head and his gaze to his hands, which were now held in tight fists. "When I appeared near Hogsmeade, right after the last battle, I knew I couldn't walk around freely as I was; conservative instincts. Luckily I had been taught a strong glamour charm by Tonks," The Tonks in the room startled when she heard her name, "and even though I wasn't a Metamorphmagus like her I caught the gyps of it pretty quickly. So who better to transform myself into than the only father figure I had ever known? I tried to take on the shape of what you would have looked like as a kid my age at Hogwarts, Sirius, with only some slight differences. But...it was hard to be under the scrutiny of the people I once loved...I wanted to end this first, before coming to you in my true appearance. But I guess I can't escape it. At least I've gotten Tom's attention now."

He received befuddled looks but ignored them in favor of chuckling to himself. Now Snape really questioned the boy's mental health.

"Neither can live while the other survives...Who will win this time, Tom? We're at a draw, Tom...I...I am...Harry..."

He lifted his piercing gaze slowly and his features changed. Harry had forgotten everyone around him and solely concentrated on Sirius and Remus; not even Albus, who inhaled sharply at his changing shape, was included in this fatidic moment. Albus, who was as wide eyed and speechless as everyone else for a change.

"I am Harry James Potter."

Only pure silence reigned as Harry pushed a few strands of his mop of wild dark hair on the side, revealing a detailed tattoo of a Phoenix that suspiciously looked like Fawkes, starting on his cheek and going down his neck, only to disappear under his shirt. His arms were bare, so another intricate but foreign mark could be seen on his left forearm; it wasn't the Dark Mark, though.

"I am Lily Evans' son. I am James Potter's son...but I am nothing like him," Harry said with vehemence and a glare, watching Sirius' and Remus' awed faces as they slowly, shakily, walked toward him and stopped in front of him.

Both older men started to touch him hesitantly, his cheeks, his mop of hair, his shoulders, his arms, as if they were too baffled to fully grasp who he really was just yet. Sirius' touch and slightly dreaming gaze remained on the mark on his left forearm for a while until Harry took his arm back in uneasiness.

Blue and golden eyes clashed with shocking green and both Marauders blinked. "Merlin! Your eyes! Look at his eyes Remus! No Potter has ever had this eye color before! I can't believe it! You're real!" Sirius breathed shakily.

Harry gave them a wavy smile and they both hugged him suddenly, their faces still holding the unbelieving look.

Severus scowled. "How can you be so sure he's telling the truth? It's all sounding so farfetched to me, other dimensions..." the man scoffed and looked at Albus.

The Headmaster nodded, still unsure of how to react. "I can always give him some truth serum..."

"If you have some right now just give it to me so I can end this." Harry surprised everyone with his forwardness, the Headmaster and Severus included. Then, the boy's green eyes darkened slightly. "But I warn you now: any too personal questions about myself or my

past...and you won't get any answers. I don't appreciate to be forced into telling my past."

Severus scoffed and rolled his eyes, making Harry shot him a dark look, before the man got up, retrieved a vial from his robes and gave them to the boy.

Sirius grimaced at the Potions Master but quickly turned his undying attention on his newly found Godson. "Oh yeah! I almost forgot to ask!" Sirius said, feeling all giddy all of a sudden. "How are James and Lily and us too, for that matter, in the other world?"

Harry was about to swallow the liquid in the vial when he froze, his eyes dimming in brightness and becoming unfocused in pain. "They're dead. Everyone's dead. Fawkes is dead. Hogwarts is dead."

Then, without looking at Sirius horrified eyes, he tipped the bottle and drank its entire content. His eyes glazed over and Dumbledore quickly cast a charm on the people that would allow only him to ask the questions, to everyone's dismay.

"What is your true name and where do you come from?" Dumbledore started.

When he answered, Harry's voice was empty, as if he was an automat. "My name is Harry James Potter. I come from a world parallel to this one."

Mouths opened in the Great Hall to exclaim their shock but no sound came out.

"Why are you here? Who sent you here and how did you get the Phoenix tattoo?"

"I am here to aid in the war against Voldemort. Fawkes sent me here to give me a new chance to live after the final war. And about the tattoo, your guess is about as good as mine, yet I think it's from Fawkes. It appeared when my wands merged. I don't want to be questioned about that," Harry said emptily, but frankly.

Albus frowned and asked a question that was surely plaguing Severus' mind. "Why do you think that a kid your age can make a difference in the war? Why didn't you stay away from all of this? And what is that strange mark on your left forearm? It wasn't there before."

Harry frowned but his eyes remained foggy. "I'm not a kid, never had enough time to be one. Threats follow me and Tom is always at the end of them. It wouldn't have mattered that I hide or not when I arrived here; I would have become involved in the war one way or another, so might as well go forth and not wait at the last second and be caught in something I would have had no control over. I also don't want to loose anyone who's dear to me again. The mark appeared on my arm a little later than the Phoenix tattoo. It was a necessity at the time but I did not intentionally called it forth; my new wand also did this. I will not speak further about this subject."

Sirius gave Albus an imploring look and the old man sighed and relented. "What happened to your parents, Sirius and Remus in your world? How come you're still alive?"

Harry's eyes closed tightly, his mouth opened but no sound came out. When he opened his eyes again they were almost completely clear and Sirius stepped back at the amount of pain he saw in them.

"I..." Harry was clearly fighting the truth serum now. "My parents...One year old...Godric's Hollow...Voldemort...I don't...I refuse..." These words were strained.

Albus gave Severus the sign so he could give Harry the antidote even if the old man wanted to know more; the boy was starting to cough and he would be sick if he continued to fight the potion at this intensity.

Harry quickly gulped the content of the vial down and sat down heavily, relieved when it immediately took effect.

Remus kneeled in front of him and gave him a worried look. "We're sorry. We won't ask you any more questions about your past

anymore. But you have to know that if we were worried about you before, Sirius and I will be even more caring from now on. So it's only natural we want to know more about you, do you understand this, Harry?"

Obviously, Dumbledore had lifted the silencing spell.

Harry gazed at Remus with an expression that bordered love, hope, fear and apprehension...a lot of it. The boy was the first one to break eye contact. "When I tell you what I can do, the powers I have, you won't be so excited about my presence," Harry muttered darkly, puzzling Sirius and Remus even more.

"What do you mean, my boy?" Albus asked but Harry shook his head negatively.

"No...no..."

Sirius noticed that Harry was starting to breathe faster so he suddenly hugged the boy. Remus watched his friend, sure that Harry, a seventeen years old boy, would push the adult away but to his silent surprise Harry gripped Sirius back with no intention to let go even if everyone saw him.

He was certain Harry would only think of this gesture as a moment of weakness tomorrow but he appeared so small and vulnerable to Remus at this instant that it even left Sirius baffled.

Harry only tightened his grasp on Sirius and breathed in; the smell of his Godfather was different on some level, something Harry wasn't completely used to yet.

His Sirius had smelled of Azkaban, despair, hope, anger and childishness, if those could even be smelled, and even of wet dog.

This Sirius hadn't endured half of what his Sirius had but there was a distinctive smell present that represented the man and was familiar.

The thought of his Sirius made Harry sober-up and come back to the harsh reality. The boy stepped out of the hug and turned around, to Sirius' confusion.

“Harry?”

“I need to go outside, take some fresh air,” was the only response he got before Harry ran out of the room.

Sirius was about to follow when Remus gripped his friend's shoulder and shook his head. “As much as I also want to be there with him, Sirius, I think this is as hard for him as it is for us. Give him some time.”

“But Remus! It's dangerous outside!”

“Somehow, I don't think Harry will be in any kind of danger for now. Remember: he has many untold secrets.”

Sirius grunted; now that he had his Godson back, a new reason to live, he would not let go. Problem was, Sirius was impatient and made brash and impulsive decisions when he wanted something. Dealing with Harry in his state needed anything but that.

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Harry breathed in deeply, relieved to be outside and smell the approaching spring air. To be in the presence of so many easily impressionable people he cared about but who were still dead in his eyes made his heart ache.

He was walking on the castle grounds for at least an hour before he heard a squawk. Lifting his head, Harry let out a happy bark of laughter and joy when he saw the familiar white owl. “Hedwig! I missed you!”

The owl landed on his shoulder and he petted and cooed to her. She nipped his fingers in a sign of affection and if she hadn't been an owl he would probably have hugged her already.

But seeing Hedwig made him suddenly think about his second familiar. "Hedwig?" he started with worry laced in his voice, "do you know where Nagini is? Last time I saw her it was on the borders of the Quidditch pitch where I left her so I could play with Madam Hooch."

Hedwig hooted but didn't fly away; she didn't know the whereabouts of the snake. Harry walked toward the pitch and searched in every hole around it; Nagini wasn't there. He was starting to be concerned about her.

"Maybe she went to see the Ashwinder..." Harry speculated and ran to Hagrid's hut. Luckily, the half-giant was still in the Great Hall with the others so he entered the hut and quickly marched to the box with the faint red glow around it.

Fang barked at him and he petted the huge dog's head, even receiving quite a dripping wet lick on the hand for it. Harry grimaced and wiped his hand on his robes before he bent down to talk with the Ashwinder. "Hello there! Do you know where Nagini is?"

The Ashwinder lifted its head to greet him. "So you finally decided to show up again, man-snake? In your true appearance, no less."

Harry gave her an apologizing look. "I'm sorry. I was caught in trouble and had to escape. I'm just happy that everybody is alright and I hope Nagini is too."

Harry was certain that if the Ashwinder had a mouth for it, it would have smiled in relief. "I am glad you are unhurt, man-snake. Nagini was very worried about you. She is in the dark forest behind this hut, maybe with the hunting Great One? I can go and search for her, tell her that you are back and are waiting for her."

One eyebrow lifted. 'Great One? Oh! The Basilisk! That's right! It can go out to hunt, I gave him the permission.'

“That would be very nice of you, red one. When you find her, tell her to join me in the castle. My identity has been revealed but she will still have to be careful about not being hexed. Snakes aren't popular in these days. Say hi to the Great One, also. Thank you for your help.”

The Ashwinder gave the impression of nodding and Harry helped it to get out of the box. It slithered outside and disappeared in the Forbidden Forest.

Hedwig hooted and he petted her feathers absentmindedly. “I hope Nagini will be alright...”

He spent the rest of the day seated on Hagrid's doorsteps in hope of seeing the Ashwinder return but alas.

When the day made way for the night, Hedwig flew away to hunt. Harry decided it was time he went back to Hogwarts to face the music.

A few heads turned in his direction when he entered but Harry was thankful for the fact that the students had to go back to their dormitories at this hour. The only thing that surprised Harry was that Sirius and Remus were there, giving off the impression of having waited for him all day long without budging from their spot.

“Sirius? Remus?”

Both men startled when he called out for them and they ran to Harry, hugging him and checking him for any sign of injuries. “You were gone for so long! We were worried!” Sirius exclaimed in decreasing panic. “Where were you!”

Harry smiled softly; it was good to know they cared about him that much, but they would learn with time that he could defend himself very well. “I spent all day near Hagrid's hut, waiting for my second familiar to show up. Unfortunately she didn't, but there's still time. I've been gone and separated from her for too long so she decided to hide.”

Remus and Sirius gave him curious looks. "You have two familiars?" Remus asked, interested in the subject.

Harry nodded. "Yeah...You've already seen Hedwig. You know, the white owl."

Both men nodded when they recalled the beautiful white bird. "And I bet the second one's a Hippogriff or something like that!" Sirius exclaimed with a proud grin.

Harry didn't answer and started to walk up the stairs. Remus and Sirius eyed him worriedly. "Harry? Where are you going? Did I say something wrong?" The dog Animagus asked.

Harry shook his head and sighed, turning around to give his Godfather a small grin. "I'm just tired, that's all. I want to go to sleep. I'll see you both in the morning!"

'They only see me as a Gryffindor and nothing else...especially Sirius. How will they react? How will the Order react?' Harry thought sadly as he disappeared up the main stairway.

In the entrance, Sirius and Remus were talking quietly when Albus showed up from the Great Hall with some of the Order members in tow; they all looked exhausted. "Was it Harry I just saw going upstairs?" he Headmaster asked curiously.

Sirius nodded. "I hope I didn't say anything that offended him concerning his familiars..."

Albus raised an eyebrow. "He has more than one familiar? Odd. I will leave him alone for now but I will still need some answers later. Minerva? Could you prepare two new guestrooms? Diagon Alley has been attacked and so Madam Malkin and Ollivander will stay at Hogwarts from now on."

McGonagall nodded and walked away with the few students who were still up at this hour.

“I’m going back to my dungeon,” Severus muttered, and the crowd of Order members dispersed a few minutes later.

“I cannot believe James’ son was under our noses all this time. James Evans...so evident, yet so difficult to grasp. He knew that the Harry in this world was dead so he didn’t even had to search for his false name. We would never have guessed if he hadn’t told us.” Albus stroked his white beard and quirked his lips at both Marauders. “He’s a clever one.”

Sirius and Remus could only nod silently. “It’s weird. I feel as if I go to sleep he won’t be there tomorrow,” Sirius said shakily.

Remus put a hand on Sirius’ shoulder. “I know what you mean. I feel as if we’re in a dream.”

The headmaster left them and they both retreated to their own quarters for a night of restless sleep.

Another chapter done! Hope you liked! I can’t give you a preview of the next chapter because I haven’t started to write it yet. Stupid school...

REVIEW!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos ;)

Chapter 17: A game?

Harry woke up with the unpleasant feeling of being spied upon. The presence he felt, even with his eyes closed, was too close to his personal boundaries but when he was about to move to get his wand under his pillow, he smelled that familiar yet different aroma of his Godfather.

“Sirius, would you kindly back away a little?” Harry said in mild annoyance when he opened his eyes.

Someone chortled in the background when Sirius blushed and muttered an apology while stepping back; he had been mere centimeters from Harry’s face.

The Boy-Who-Lived didn’t have to see who was also in the room; where Sirius Black was Remus Lupin was never far.

“Merlin! You’re real! You’re really here, alive...” Sirius breathed with awe and dreamy eyes.

Harry lifted an eyebrow and the corner of his lips quirked up in light amusement. “Oh yes, Sirius, I’m very real.”

Remus tried to cover his chuckles with a hand and put the other on his friend’s shoulder. “We apologize, Harry. This situation is still new to us and hard to realize. Sirius just couldn’t wait to see you so we asked your password to the Headmaster.”

Harry’s eyes twitched in irritation at Albus but his gaze softened when it fell on the Werewolf. “That’s fine, Remus. I was using this room’s old password anyway; I was too tired to change it yesterday. What time is it? Has anything happened?”

Both men left the room to let Harry change but Remus called out from the small living room; “It’s already ten o’clock but we didn’t have the courage to wake you up. There’s been quite the commotion this morning because yesterday Diagon Alley was attacked. Most of the

people who were present managed to flee but there were some casualties, unfortunately. Gringotts is still as safe as ever, though, and we'll have a couple of new allies and refugees. Madam Malkin will stay here from now on, as well as Ollivanders and all of his wands."

Harry joined them in the living room and they stared at him some more before they all departed for the Great Hall.

Some students and adults were walking in the corridors and they stopped to stare at Harry as the trio passed by them. Sirius put an arm around Harry's shoulders when he noticed how tense and uncomfortable the boy was when under such scrutiny; he glared hard at the ogling bunch, as Remus did, and they quickly scurried away in fear of being the target of Professor Black's wrath.

Sirius glanced down at his Godson – the word was still amazing to say – and he grinned good-naturedly. "You're not the show-off type, aren't you? Not at all like James was. He liked being the center of attention; you could almost say he craved it..."

Remus chuckled at the mental image of a young James intentionally ruffling his hair even more to stand out in the crowd and sending beaming and charming smiles at all the girls.

Harry's lips did not quirk up one bit.

"I'm nothing like him. I never craved attention; I never asked to be..." The boy stopped and sneered shortly.

Sirius and Remus glanced at each other worriedly and they tried to press Harry to finish his phrase. The green eyed boy looked away, refusing the eye contact. "All I've ever wanted was to be normal," he muttered darkly to himself, but both Marauders heard him anyway; they felt powerless and clueless. How could they help him when they didn't even know what was ailing Harry?

Once again, when they entered the Great Hall, all conversations stopped. Sirius, Remus and Harry held their head up high and the dark haired boy watched everyone with eyes of steel and

determination. "Headmaster," Harry nodded his head in greeting, and the old man did the same with twinkling eyes.

"Mr. Potter, Sirius, Remus, how nice of you to finally join us. Harry, I'm sure you know Madam Malkin and Mister Ollivanders already." Dumbledore pointed at said people who were sitting at the Head Table.

Madam Malkin got up to shake the boy's hand enthusiastically, contrary to the current mood in the room. "My God, so it's true! You can't be anything else but James and Lily's son! Amazing!" She shook his hand so excitedly that Harry had to extirpate his poor aching member from the grip. He gave an uneasy smile at the woman and murmured a greeting.

Ollivanders, however, was narrowing his eyes at him curiously as if something was amiss. Dumbledore called him on it and Harry smirked and stepped in the wand-maker's direction. "Oh yeah, now that everyone knows who I am..." he let his phrase trail and suddenly pointed his wand at Ollivanders, making the white haired man and the people around him gasp.

"What are you doing!" Xiomara almost shouted, but Harry shrugged them off.

"Admoneo!"

Before Ollivanders could even open his mouth the spell had hit him straight on the forehead, making him blink when nothing hurt afterward. His eyes narrowed as memories flooded his head and he gasped and swiftly got up, making his chair fall behind him. He steeped back and pointed an accusing finger at Harry. "YOU!"

Harry lifted an eyebrow.

Everybody watched on with interest, curious of the spell the boy had used on the wand-maker.

“ YOU! Y-you OBLIVIATED ME!” The old man cried out in indignation.

Dumbledore’s eyebrows shot-up and he turned to Harry. “Is this true Harry?”

The green eyed boy gave the Headmaster an impish look and shrugged. “He discovered the truth before the time was right. It still isn’t, but since everyone knows I don’t see any reason to leave Ollivanders in the dark about me.”

Sirius watched the interaction between both older men and his Godson with interest. “What happened to make Ollivanders discover who you were?” he asked to Harry, but before he could open his mouth to reply Ollivanders had already started to answer. “His wand! That’s right! Albus! His wand! It’s the second one!”

Now everybody was simply confused.

“The second one? Of what?” Severus asked suspiciously.

Harry sighed and sat down, a calm expression back on his face. The other adults slowly followed suite. The dark haired boy took his wand from his holster again and he fingered it with care.

Dumbledore, who knew what Ollivanders was talking about, studied the wand but could not recognize it. “That’s not the second wand, Ollivanders. Are you sure you’re of what you’re talking about?”

The wand-maker threw a small glare at Dumbledore. “Of course I’m certain!” he snapped, “I haven’t been a wand-maker for so long without knowing every wand I made by heart!”

Dumbledore lifted his hands in mock surrender.

Harry’s lips quirked up. “Dumbledore, it’s indeed the second one.”

Albus' head turned so fast toward Harry that it almost snapped. Sirius growled in impatience. "Anyone care to tell me what the Hell you three are talking about? You're not the only ones in the room!"

Harry blinked at Sirius and showed his Godfather the red wand, which Sirius studied shortly.

"This wand didn't always have this appearance," Harry started, catching each person's attention. "In my old world, my wand accepted me even though its brother belongs to my enemy."

Sirius blinked but Remus was faster than the Animagus. The Werewolf paled considerably. "The Dark Lord...?" he whispered in a silent question, and all it took to confirm the answer was a sigh from the boy.

"Yes...Tom has the first of two unique wands, made from a Phoenix feather core each, Fawkes' feathers. But when I went to Diagon Alley to get something for Rosmerta I stopped by Ollivanders' shop because I felt a strange pull. It was a shock for both of us to see the second Phoenix feather core wand of this world merge with mine, which are the exact same wands but from two different worlds. It's kind of complicated to explain, but this is the result of the merging. It took me some time to get used to this new wand, actually, since its power is wilder. But it's helping me control my magic better, a fact which I'm grateful for."

Sirius eyed him worriedly. "What's wrong with your magic?"

Harry's eyes darkened and hazed over; he was thinking about the time when he finally defeated the Voldemort of his world. "Before I arrived...I, we, were in a war against Voldemort."

People gasped when they heard him say the name without hesitation.

He omitted to tell anything else of this war and its ending for the moment; it was still too fresh of a wound in his heart.

“When I arrived here I felt a tremendous change in my magic core. I could feel my old wand having some difficulty to channel this new arrival of magic but I managed. Using wandless magic was also becoming easier, I noted with time.” Harry stopped and looked around him; he only received back some more stares, if not wary ones.

“Wandless magic? That’s not exactly a Light Art, you know...” Sirius said uneasily, and he almost recoiled when Harry let out a harsh bark of laughter. “Sirius, whoever said I was a Light wizard?”

The Animagus’ eyes widened in alarm and some people actually shrieked and backed away from him. Alastor Moody had his wand pointed at him in no time but Harry gazed back steadily at the Auror. “You! You’re a Dark Wizard?” the old auror growled menacingly.

Harry sneered but stayed seated, not showing any sign of needing to take his wand out. “Fools! You only see what you want to see; you only hear what you want to hear!” Harry snapped, but then he breathed in deeply and cleared his mind with Occlumency before something bad happened.

“I never said I was a Dark Wizard like Tom. I only said I wasn’t a Light Wizard. Contrary to your beliefs, there IS a shade in between: grey. If you all had lived the kind of life I’ve had, you would’ve been bound to turn the way I did. My parents were murdered when I was one; I got to live with the Dursleys –My mother’s sister family- who are complete muggles and magic-haters to the core for eleven full years before I was accepted at Hogwarts at eleven. I didn’t even know what magic was, for God’s sake! And don’t get me started on what happened at Hogwarts for the next years!” Harry had bunched his fists so tightly that his knuckles were white.

Nobody dared talk.

Sirius frowned and gaped when he finally remembered Lily’s sister. “You were sent to Petunia Dursley! That bony and despicable sister

of Lily's! Whose barmy idea was that! Why not live with Remus or me?"

Harry's eyes became almost Black. "I don't want to talk about this here." His answer was final and Sirius shut his mouth, knowing this was a delicate subject.

Pending silence fell over the Great Hall and Dumbledore smacked his hands together with a jovial smile destined to ease the building tension. "Well, let's change the subject, shall we? We do have a lot to talk about beside young Harry here."

Harry was almost too happy to change the subject and got up from the Head Table to sit beside Ron at the students' table. He still received incredulous stares but nobody dared talk to him in his foul mood.

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"JAMES! Huh...HARRY! Wait up!"

Harry stopped in mid-step and waited for Ron to catch up with him. When the redhead was finally beside the dark haired boy, Ron bent down and panted a little before shooting Harry a sheepish grin. "Jeez mate! You're fast! The meeting's just only ended and you're already outside! What's the rush?"

Unlike some others, Ron was slowly starting to get used to the whole "Harry Potter" idea.

Harry smiled at Ron and answered while he kept watch toward the sky, seemingly waiting for something. "I want to send a letter to Rosmerta; Tom's starting to get daring and I have no doubt that he'll attack Hogsmeade some time or another."

Truth is, he had slackened his Occlumency wall and felt Voldemort's impatience at striking again. How the Dark Lord still didn't know who he really was, was a mystery to Harry but the boy knew it was only a

matter of time; he would feel it for sure, regardless of his status as an Occlumens.

A hoot broke him out of his thoughts and he automatically outstretched his arm so his snow white companion could land on it. "Hey Hedwig, sorry I've been gone so long, girl," Harry cooed softly, receiving a hoot and a nip on the finger as a reprimand.

Ron kept silent, watching the interaction between boy and owl with curiosity.

Harry took a letter from his pocket and let Hedwig carefully take it within her claws. "Can you take this to Rosmerta, girl? I promise I'll give you part of my lunch afterwards. I just need this to get delivered as soon as possible."

Hedwig hooted again, nipped at his finger as if to say 'You can count on me' and then she was gone, soaring above the Forbidden Forest. Harry then gazed longingly toward said forest for some unknown reason to Ron, but the ladder didn't have the time to question Harry on it since he simply turned around and walked back to Hogwarts.

Ron lifted an eyebrow in the direction of the dark wooded area and shuddered before he ran to catch up with Harry.

The Boy-Who-Lived was already inside, talking quietly with Sirius and Remus. Hermione and the others joined Ron as soon as they saw him and Hermione whacked him on the back of his head. "Ow! What was that for 'Mione!" The redhead rubbed the back of his head while his girlfriend put her hands on her hips.

"Ron! We were looking all over for you! You could have waited for us! And you know we're not allowed to go outside alone anymore! Teachers' orders!" was the witch's angry comeback.

"Miss Granger is right, Mister Weasley! What were you thinking? Death Eaters and Dementors are everywhere! You are lucky school is no longer in session or Gryffindor would have lost House Points."

Ron gaped at his Head of House: Minerva McGonagall.

“B-But Professor! I wasn’t so far away from school and I just followed Harry in the first place! Why isn’t he being chastised?” The redhead exclaimed, pointing a finger in Harry’s direction.

Minerva frowned and transferred her gaze toward the green eyed boy, who, in turn, looked at her. “You do have a point.”

Harry had heard part of their conversation and it looked as if Sirius and Remus had too; they both frowned at him in disappointment. Sirius suddenly hugged him, almost making Harry gasp.

“She’s right, Harry. It wasn’t too bright of you to go outside in the open like this. Death Eaters might be warded off, but sometimes a Dementor can enter,” Sirius said softly yet sternly. “I lost you once, Harry, and it destroyed part of my heart. Now that I have you back, I wouldn’t be able to forgive myself if something happened to you. A Dementor...is a nasty creature, Harry. It can-”

Harry, who had been comfortable in Sirius’ arms, tensed all of a sudden and pushed back against the man’s chest so he could step away from the Animagus. His face was unreadable at first, but then contained anger started to seep out of the boy, as well as a deep sadness Remus was sure no boy his age could ever possess.

“Harry?” Remus called out softly, and it was all it took for Harry’s anger to dissipate and make complete way for the sadness and bitterness of his life. “I know what a Dementor does!” Harry snapped at them shortly, his voice straining and sour, his eyes trained on the suddenly interesting floor.

Sirius stepped toward Harry and gazed at him with a concerned look. “Harry? What do you-”

The entrance doors banged open and all eyes immediately transferred onto an Auror Harry didn’t recognize. “Dumbledore!” The man looked frantic. “The Death Eaters are attacking Diagon Alley again!”

The Headmaster promptly sprung into action, ordering the most powerful of them to aid those who needed help. "Alastor! Tonks! Kingsley! Charlie! Bill! Sirius! Remus! Arthur! You go back with Nathaniel! I'll join you in a minute!"

Those who were called started to run outside but Harry called out to those he considered to be his family. "Sirius! Remus! I'll come with you!" Harry took his wand out but his arm was caught tightly before he could follow his instincts to fight. "Let me go!"

Try as he might, Snape wouldn't let go.

"No Harry! You stay here! It's too dangerous for someone who's not trained properly, for you! This isn't a game!" Sirius barked sternly.

Harry looked at Remus -who was still impatiently waiting for Sirius- for help but the Werewolf shook his head as a definite and non-negotiable NO.

The dark haired boy looked back at Sirius and both had a stare-down. Sirius frowned and Remus made him remember that people were still in danger in Diagon Alley.

Harry bent his head and stopped fighting the Potions Master's relentless grip. Sirius nodded in satisfaction and ran away with Remus so they could apparate out of the castle's wards.

Harry didn't see them run away.

"Let me go."

Severus glared at the back of the boy's head before he let go of Harry. "For Merlin's sake, boy! Stop wanting to play hero! This is indeed not a game!" the man shouted at Harry's eerily silent form.

Dumbledore gave the teachers some orders to keep the school safe and gazed sternly at the boy who was still giving them the silent treatment and standing with his back turned toward them. "Mister

Potter, this is no time to brood. You're acting like a spoiled child," the old man said before he, too, went outside.

As soon as those words left Dumbledore's mouth, Harry bunched his hands into tight fists and clenched his teeth so hard his jaw almost cracked. He walked calmly in the direction of the staircase, but his body was obviously as stiff as a board.

"Harry? You know they're right. We're just kids; we don't have anything to do with this." Ron's breath caught in his throat when Harry's head snapped in his direction and he was on the receiving end of a frigid glare.

The redhead shivered and quickly lowered his eyes and backed away while Harry simply disappeared upstairs.

"Ron?" Hermione put a hand on her boyfriend's arm and the boy jumped and shuddered. "You should have seen it, 'Mione. The glare he sent me...it was so cold!"

Severus brushed it aside with a scoff. "Bah! Let the boy brood, for all I care. He's acting just like his attention-seeker of a father."

"Severus! That comment was uncalled for!" Minerva sent him a stiff scowl and the Potions Master shrugged it off and went back to his dungeons.

McGonagall sighed and took charge of the castle while Albus was gone. The remaining students were ushered back to their common rooms; the majority of them were already there anyway.

"Professor McGonagall, what about Harry?" Ron asked carefully.

Minerva merely told him that she would ask some teachers to go look for him and to go back to his Common Room directly, which frustrated the Weasley boy. He had to obey nonetheless and the little Gryffindor group, flanked with Fred and George, marched back to Gryffindor tower.

“Hey Ron? Do you really think Harry’s an attention-seeker?” Dean asked out of the blue.

The redhead shot him a look. “Are you siding with Snape, Thomas?” he snapped.

Dean had the decency to look embarrassed and he muttered; “Well, no...but...Did you even try to ask yourself why Ja- Harry seems so intent to fight? It doesn’t even concern him! To me, it really looks as if he wanted to show off. I mean, what can a kid do against an army of Death Eaters and Dementors?”

“Dean has a point,” Seamus reasoned, and mutters of consent followed.

Hermione was silent during the entire exchange, her brain working overtime. “I...I don’t think that’s it, you guys,” she said slowly, still searching for the best word to use.

“What do you mean Hermione?” asked Denis Creevey with curiosity.

The Ravenclaw girl rubbed her chin and frowned in her thoughts. “I don’t know...but don’t you think it’s weird that he wants to fight so willingly? It’s as if Harry was thinking that he holds a responsibility in this war.”

Ron chuckled. “Stop thinking, ‘Mione. You’re not making any sense anyway.”

The girl scowled and whacked her boyfriend on the shoulder, to the others’ amusement.

.....

Far be it for Harry to be an attention-seeker, however.

His intentions were the purest, if even self-sacrificing, but nobody seemed to understand that, to give him a chance.

Tight, slack. Tight, slack.

Harry's fists were acting on their own accord as if wanting to let some pressure out.

'They don't understand. They're not even giving me a chance to explain myself. They act as if I was a kid. They're stuck up. Self conceited. They're not...they're not my friends. They're mirror images of those I once cared about.' Harry's eyes were hard and emotionless as he gazed at his reflection in one of the mirrors in Moaning Myrtle's lavatory on the second floor.

He silently traced his reflection on the glass before he let out a short cry of rage and punched it with all he had, making hundreds of sharp shards fly in every direction before hitting the wet bathroom tile.

A shard hit Harry on the left cheek, the one opposed to his tattooed one, and he didn't even wince in pain. He simply lifted a hand and traced the cut, smearing blood all over his face and even more so because he used the hand that had punched the mirror and dripping blood on the floor.

"This isn't a game," he stated tensely before his rage took over again. His wand quivered in its holster but was unable to prevent the too powerful burst of magic that made all the windows in the lavatory explode one after the other.

Harry didn't seem to have a care in the world.

He leaned on the "right" sink and whispered in Parseltongue; the huge sink started to move and Harry backed away so it could fully open.

"Let them do what they want, but while they're getting hurt and Tom advances, I'll rally my allies and prepare for a strike that will weaken him." Harry smiled darkly and jumped in the tunnel, the sink closing behind him.

Silence reigned back into the lavatory except for the occasional drop of water falling into a sink or a remaining shard barely attached from its windowpane hitting the ground.

A translucent hand appeared from one of the toilet stalls, and then followed by a timid head. Moaning Myrtle's form shook as she finally showed herself.

The ghost looked around at the mess left in her lavatory and tutted. "Oh, he's being a bad boy! He's up to something!" She giggled. "I should tell, but why? No one's ever come here to talk to me, except him, that is."

She humphed and giggled again. "Then I'll keep quiet! Serves them right!"

.....

Harry didn't know it yet, but he already had some sort of ally in the form of Moaning Myrtle, one of many to come.

"Man-ssnake? You have finally returned. I came back ass sssoon ass Firey-One informed uss of your return."

Harry was happy and surprised to see Salazar waiting for him in the Chamber of Secrets and he petted the Basilisk accordingly. "I'm glad you are alright, Ssalazar, and I apologize for worrying you like thiss. What about Nagini?" the Parselmouth hissed questioningly.

"Sshe iss coming back with Firey-One, but it iss taking longer for them because they are of ss smaller ssizess. We were hunting pretty far deep in the dark foresst. We even came in contact with ssome half-beingss but we did not harm them on your orderss, masster. They found thiss highly unusssual, I believe."

Harry pondered on this new development.

"Half-beingsss, Ssalazar? Are you perhapss talking about the Centaurss who inhabit the Forbidden Foresst?"

The Basilisk hissed the affirmative and Harry was taken by a sudden ingenious yet completely insane idea. "Do you know where Nagini will be waiting for me?"

"No, but I believe it is a matter of you calling her; you are bonded by a mark, I believe."

Harry gazed at his left forearm pensively. "It may work, thank you Ssalazar."

The Basilisk hissed and went back into the mouth of the statue, intent on getting some rest.

"This may work, but I'll need a shipload of diplomatic patience...especially with Bane, if he's remotely anything like the one from my world."

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When he exited the Chamber and found himself back in the lavatory, what was Harry's shock to see Myrtle giggling and winking conspiratorially at him with a finger on her closed mouth, as if she wanted to say: "Your secret is safe with me!"

He was grateful at the ghost, though, and winked back before he wandlessly put every broken thing back together and walked away.

"Engorgio Invisibility Cloak," he muttered after taking the miniaturized version out of his pocket; he didn't leave anything in his room since Dumbledore was sometimes too nosy for his own good. "Some things never change..."

He put the cloak on and walked out of the castle without being detected by either Filch, Mrs. Norris or any of the wandering teachers looking for him. With Dumbledore and Moody gone to fight, he could use it without fear of being detected.

Walking up to Hagrid's hut was no big feat and when he finally reached his destination he concentrated on the mark which linked Nagini to him. He was relieved to feel she was near and greeted her enthusiastically when she came out of the woodland and slithered on his arm, the Ashwinder following closely behind.

"Nagini! I'm glad to sssee you! The Firey-One wass fasst to find you; thiss iss good."

Nagini coiled around his arm and shoulders and greeted him back. "Young masster, I wass worried about you. I am alsso relieved to ssee you are well."

Harry smiled softly and sat down on Hagrid's doorstep, the Ashwinder staying on the ground and sometimes putting its two cents in the conversation.

An hour later, Hedwig had come back and joined them, perching herself above the door of the hut after giving Harry another letter he would read later.

Harry gazed at both his familiars and, after a moment of reflection, he took out a quill and a piece of parchment and started to write a letter to somebody else.

Centaur Bane,

I seek help from your noble and ancient race in this war against a common enemy: Voldemort. Yes, I write the name as I say it. Believe me, I know your aversion for the human species more than anyone else but this war, I am sure you are aware even if you try to deny it, is as much our business as yours. You are indirectly linked to it whether you all like it or not; your future depends on its outcome as much as ours does. Your impartiality will be forgotten and tested; he will try to either rally you or destroy you, and no amount of great force you would certainly show against him will have any effect if you stand alone, if only your demise.

No, I am not Dumbledore, nor anything like him. If you do not like the way he proceeds, imagine how I feel. But, as this whole matter

cannot be discussed in a simple letter, we should arrange a meeting in the Forbidden Forest, your domain, because I am well aware of your dislike of the outside world. You can rally your clan members if you like, but Firenze is one I would like to see again above all else.

If you doubt me or my words, go to Firenze and tell him that Mars is shining bright; he will understand this better than the false name of James Evans.

I have fought Voldemort once and I will not hesitate to do it again; you have the word of one Harry James Potter (as I said, my true identity cannot be discussed in a letter). I trust you will make the right choice. Please do not hurt my familiars, by the way. I know they are as different as night and day, but you will find that I do not hold any ill will against any creatures, whether they are considered light or dark. You have already encountered, or at least your comrades did, Salazar, the Basilisk. Now, Nagini and Hedwig will make themselves the pleasure of waiting for your reply.

I wish you well.

H.J.P.

Harry re-read the letter and called Hedwig to him. "Give this to Bane, Hedwig. I want you to go with Nagini, though. Nagini, you will follow Hedwig. She will bring me the reply and when she does, you will wait for me in the Chamber of Secrets so you can go back to your place on my left arm without anyone seeing you. Be careful."

Nagini slithered on the ground and Hedwig actually flew low and slowly so the snake could easily keep up with her. She probably understood Harry's intention to shock Bane by this sudden appearance of an owl and a snake (one considered Voldemort's, nothing less than a mystery), delivering a letter together.

Harry was taking a big chance by gambling with Bane's love of nature, animals and his sense of righteousness. He wanted to peak the hard leader's interest from the beginning by omitting the most important information from the letter. He could only wait and see what the result would be.

“It iss getting cold, you sshould go back to the casstle, young man-ssnake, and sssee to the life flowing out of you,” the Ashwinder admonished and Harry reluctantly nodded, noticing that his “life”, also called his blood by human standards, was still slowly flowing out of his hand, drop after drop. It wasn’t to a dangerous level, though, so Harry didn’t feel faint at all.

“Do you wissh to go back inside Hagrid’s hut?” he asked before getting up.

The Ashwinder thought about it and politely refused the offer, saying that it would like to be free for a while. That didn’t prevent it from hiding in the hut to seek some warmth, though, and it would be easy for Harry to find it if he needed its help.

“ Alright, but don’t go laying eggsss all over the place. Hagrid doessn’t need hiss hut to burn down to assness,” the boy joked and walked away after putting his father’s cloak back on.

He waited for an adult to come out ‘probably still searching for me’, he mused, before he quickly made his way in; a door opening alone would have brought too much suspicion.

The Deputy-Headmistress was still giving away orders to find him, apparently. Luckily, they couldn’t go into his quarters anymore since he had blocked the floo system and changed his password; they would never be able to guess what it was either, nor be able to pronounce it correctly.

He simply passed by the restless adults and walked up the stairs with a scowl marring his face. ‘I should have stayed as James Evans. They respected him, considered him a worthy opponent, feared him, at least. But I was acting as I act now, so what has changed for them to treat me like that, to simply dismiss me from their conversations? To...to treat me like a helpless kid!’ Harry wanted to snarl the last part aloud for the whole castle to hear.

His magical aura was straining to be released once again. Even the portrait guarding his quarters seemed to quiet down and it was only a landscape! But the wind in it did die down and the trees became motionless.

He glared at the painting coldly as if he wanted to burn a hole in it and, after a few minutes of debating whether it would actually happen or not, he settled for muttering the password. "Ssslytherin and Gryffindor united."

Ahh, the pleasure of being a Parselmouth.

He let himself fall on his bed and closed his green eyes, planning his future moves. There were some things he still needed to do and not a lot of time to do them all. He already had Myrtle's vote of confidence, thank Merlin for that, as well as Nagini and Salazar on his side, precious allies that they are.

Now he had to sway Bane to his side; maybe it would prove to be an easier task with him than Dumbledore, whom Bane hated with a passion. The old Headmaster talked more than he acted and if manipulation didn't work, it often transformed into a silent yet noticeable threat.

Harry, however, was putting his cards on the table with a frank attitude and wanted a durable union with the Centaurs. He would also have to have another chat with Aragog and Mosag; as dangerous as it sounded.

The Sorting Hat would also receive his visit for there was a certain something he wanted to retrieve...something that belonged to him in the first place anyway.

He sighed and took his cloak off tiredly, now having too many things to think about and plan. He got up sluggishly and started to wash the blood from his stinging cheek and hand, then using a healing potion to accelerate the healing process.

He remembered the letter from Rosmerta and read it with haste. It was the usual "I-can't-believe-it-I heard-rumors-but-I-didn't-think-they-

were-true-you're-really-Harry-Potter!" kind of letter, until it mentioned that she would close The Three Broomsticks and join Hogwarts with some other villagers who were also feeling insecure and deemed Hogsmeade unfit to live in until the crisis ended.

‘Great, I will have Rosmerta to deal with when she arrives...’ Harry rolled his eyes and put the letter aside. He only wanted to get some sleep for now. It was only the end of the afternoon but he didn’t care; he simply hoped that the fight in Diagon Alley would end in the favor of the close-minded members of the Order of the Phoenix and not in a bloody massacre.

He fingered the tattoo on his cheek. “I’m also a member, Hell! It’s right there, branded in my face as big and obvious as it can possibly get! Why are they ignoring me? Well, I’ll just ignore them too, if this is what they want. Let THEM play while I actually DO something to help, to make the balance bend in our favor. They’re loosing people; I’m acting to PREVENT the losses.”

Right now no one could make him loose the scowl and determination etched on his face; he actually fell asleep with it.

Another chapter done! I thought I was going to reveal Nagini but decided against it; it’ll be a surprise for later use. But it is coming soon. I haven’t started on the next chapter so don’t ask me what’ll happen. All I know is that it will be entitled ‘Alliance’ or something along that line.

Until next time!

REVIEW!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos ;)

Chapter 18: Alliance

As Harry predicted, the hospital wing was full the next morning. He watched, amongst a crowd of curious students, Madam Pomfrey bustling around energetically under the obvious symptoms of having taken a vial of Pepper-Up potion; she had apparently been going at it since the middle of the night.

The probing students were pushed out of the Infirmary door by a weary looking Albus and Harry stepped aside to avoid getting trampled over. He set his empty gaze on the crying children lying on the beds and the injured adults re-telling the attack to various aurors.

He felt the Headmaster's heavy gaze fall on him, almost waiting for Harry to make a derisive comment, but to his surprise none came and the boy simply walked away without saying a word. Albus found this new attitude highly unusual but attributed it to the fact that Harry had probably never seen so many injured people, a consequence of the warring era they lived in.

As if!

Truth is; seeing Sirius and Remus laying, sleeping yet injured, on separate beds had made him turn around less he expressed his anger for all to hear...and see. 'Dumbledore will get them all hurt or worse; killed. He's not prepared enough. I have to act. Please Hedwig, come back soon with a positive reply!' Harry mentally prayed as he made his way to the Great Hall to grab a bite to eat.

He ignored McGonagall's suspicious gaze, as well as Snape's glare, with practiced ease. He choose to act as normal as possible and smiled lightly at Ron and the others, who all let a collective breath out. "Soo...are you alright, Harry? You were pretty...mad, yesterday," the redhead searched carefully for the right words to use with the dark haired boy.

Harry shrugged and helped himself to some soup. A shadow fell behind him and he almost groaned in annoyance; he knew very well who was behind him.

“Mister Potter, where were you yesterday?”

Harry turned around in his seat and gazed coolly at the Deputy Headmistress. “I was in my room, why?”

McGonagall watched him intently with her hands poised on her hips. “Professor Flitwick knocked on your door countless times but you did not answer. Your floo system was also disabled,” she stated, and Harry sighed frustratingly and raked a hand through his hair, a habit that looked very familiar for every teacher who once knew James Potter.

“Listen: I was pissed and tired and I wanted to be left alone. You want to know why I seem so eager to fight? Fine, here’s your answer: I was very involved in the one back in my world. I know how Tom acts, I know how his Death Eaters think. I was an Order member, if you’ve already forgotten it. You believed in James Evans, so why not me?”

He knew he had a valid point, one Minerva would have trouble answering. The woman didn’t quite know what to reply but obstinate as she was, she didn’t let go of the matter. “Well, you’re not in your world anymore, are you? Here there is no reason for you to get involved. Plus you’re barely what? Seventeen years old? We will not stoop so low as to ask the students to help. It’s a little too young to be killed by Death Eaters,” the teacher replied with a frown. “And you’re under our responsibility,” she added as an afterthought.

Harry got the sudden urge to laugh, which he did, making those around him jump a little in nervousness. “I won’t be killed by Death Eaters! Only Tom can get to me.”

This remark confused a lot of people but Harry continued without an explanation. “And whoever said that I was under your jurisdiction?” he asked haughtily, making Minerva’s eyes widen and her mouth close with a snap.

“I’m a guest here, not a student, for one. Plus, I’m also technically dead here so I don’t have to answer to anybody. My parents died at

the hand of Voldemort when I was barely one and everyone I loved died, including those I considered to be my only family; and I'm not talking about the muggles who 'raised' me, believe me. Petunia Evans Dursley and her family hated me with a passion."

Minerva blanched. "James and Lily were killed then, too?" she asked shakily. "Then, how did you survive?"

Harry sneered. "Ask that to the bloody scar on my forehead. Ask that to the people who baptized me the 'Boy-Who-Lived'."

His aura was starting to be felt by those whose magic was stronger. Minerva was so troubled and looking for more answers that she didn't seem to notice at all. She was about to ask another question when a hand on her shoulder stopped her and brought her back to reality. She blinked and gazed at Harry Potter, who did not look happy at all.

"That's enough, Minerva. Stop interrogating him! We all have secrets, let him keep his! Personally I don't know why you've suddenly changed the way how you treated him as James Evans; he's still the same boy in my eyes."

Harry was surprised to hear that coming from Rosmerta's mouth and shot her a thankful glance. He got up, suddenly not so hungry anymore. "Listen, if you don't want my help it's your problem. I may not want to tell you everything about my past but it's no reason to shun me and not give me a chance. Those who want to fight should have the chance, kid or not. In my world it made a difference. I want to fight and there's nothing you can do that will stop me."

"Enlightening as this conversation is, I still don't see why we should let you fight with us. Until you tell us how the Dark Lord of your world was destroyed I will not tolerate your presence amongst the Order," Severus Snape drawled with a predatory look.

Harry felt Snape trying to pry into his mind so he solidified his mental wall, to the Potions Master's hidden surprise. "Don't pry into my head, Snape," Harry deadpanned dangerously, "I'm a skilled Occlumens

and Legilimens, so don't do anything you don't want me to do to you. Defense Against the Dark Arts wasn't my best subject for nothing."

"What do you mean Harry?" Ron asked timidly, earning himself a glare from Snape.

The dark haired boy rolled his eyes. "Ask that to Trelawney. She's the one who actually predicted something right for the first time in her life, thus condemning me in the process. Now if you don't mind, I have other things to do. Rosmerta, thank you for sticking up with me. I'm happy to see you're all right."

The owner of The Three Broomsticks nodded with a small patient smile and Harry took his cue to walk away.

Minerva watched him go and as soon as he was out of earshot she sent a glare at Rosmerta even if the prediction bit rang a familiar bell in her mind that she couldn't quite remember. "You didn't help! Don't encourage him!" she hissed angrily.

Rosmerta, normally gentle and patient woman, surprised them all by glaring back at the teacher. "Why shouldn't I? His name may not be James Evans anymore but he's still the same boy. You're the ones who changed, not him. Just give him a bloody chance, he may surprise you; I know he did me," she said with finality.

McGonagall looked floored. "But he's James's and Lily's son..." she said weakly.

Rosmerta snorted rudely. "Pish posh! You heard as well as I did that his parents died as did the ones here. He may look like James but the resemblance stops there. Maybe you should try to know him better instead of patronizing him for answers; he may be more cooperative this way."

"Maybe we should listen to Madam Rosmerta," Albus interrupted wearily.

Both women jumped and greeted the Headmaster, helping him to his chair at the head table. "Albus, are you really considering asking young Mister Potter for help?" Minerva asked worriedly. "The Order can manage on its own."

Rosmerta gave her a disbelieving look. "Oh yeah, that's why half of it and those they were supposed to rescue are in the Hospital Wing," she said sarcastically, earning herself yet another mild glare from Minerva.

Albus chuckled weakly and plopped a Lemon Drop in his mouth. "Down girls. I said I would consider it; I would like to know what he has to offer us to aid in this war. I have an idea about it, but..." he stopped momentarily and his blue eyes hazed over in thought. 'If he's truly the one from the Prophecy...He would have to be marked somewhere...'

He sighed and ignored the inquisitive look Severus sent him.

"I don't think Harry's warmed up to me so I'll let Sirius and Remus handle him. I don't know why but the boy gets this strange hopeful glint in his eyes each time he sees them...It must have something to do with his past."

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Harry walked fairly rapidly in the empty corridors of the school now turned headquarters for the Light. He checked the Marauders Map to make sure that no one was on the highest floor where Dumbledore's office dwelled and he pocketed the item with a satisfied smirk when he spotted no one; also, Filch and Mrs. Norris were on the first floor and busy scaring whom Harry deduced were some of the youngest students of Hogwarts. They wouldn't be a bother.

When he stopped in front of the Gargoyle that guarded the entry of the old man's office he recited every candy password he could think of, with no success. Hell, even "Lemon Drop" didn't work, so he started to get impatient and sent a fierce look at the unmoving thing.

“Listen here you big hunk of rock! Let me pass now or you’ll regret it!” he barked menacingly.

The Gargoyle started to move, only to let out a mocking snort and blow steam from its nose.

Harry was starting to steam himself and he balled his hand into a tight fist; a metallic blue light started to glow around his hand but as he was about to launch it at the wide eyed stone guardian Fawkes appeared out of thin air in front of him, thrilling a happy tune.

Harry lifted an eyebrow and understood what the Phoenix was going to do: let him come into Dumbledore’s office by apparating Phoenix style.

The blue light receded and he gazed at the grumbling and disgruntled looking Gargoyle mockingly before throwing a raspberry at it and touching Fawkes’ feathers. A jet of flames nearly scorched him alive as Fawkes and he disappeared, leaving an echo of playful laughter resonating in the empty corridor.

When they reappeared, Harry snorted one last time at the Gargoyle’s expense and thanked the Phoenix with a smile and a few pats on the back.

Dumbledore’s office looked a lot like the one from his old world, with the exception of a few gadgets here and there Harry was sure were going to be useful for the upcoming war.

“Well, well, what do we have here?” a grave and chary voice full of condescension sounded from behind him.

Not two seconds later a portrait was at glowing wand-point. Harry, seeing who it was in the painting, re-holstered his wand and eyed the man with an unflustered look. “Phineas Nigellus. How... ‘nice’ to see you again,” he drawled, and then sharpened his features. “If you’re here to bother or denounce me then simply shut up or go away if you don’t want your frame to be hexed into oblivion.”

Phineas Nigellus, well, his portrait, at least, chuckled merely. "You have some guts, kid. You must be the Potter boy I keep hearing about. The Order members are all 'Potter-this, Potter-that', these days." The ancient headmaster of Hogwarts rolled his eyes and snorted in annoyance.

Harry narrowed his eyes. "The Order members? They're having meetings here as well as those in the Great Hall?" he asked in a dangerous tone.

Phineas shrugged. "Yes. It seems like the wizarding world is in more shit than everyone thinks but the Order doesn't want to inform the people; they think they can do everything by themselves. What a load of bull, if you ask me! But anyway, you haven't come here to talk with me, have you boy? I wonder what's going on in that head of yours," he said sneakily. "And if it concerns doing something against Dumbledore's current supervision talents I'm way in."

Harry smirked a little. "Only you could be placed in Dumbledore's office, say this and get away with it. I recognize you there, Nigellus. But you're right; I'm here because I need something that belongs to me in the first place. Do you know where the Sorting Hat might be?"

Phineas looked surprised. "The Sorting Hat belongs to you? What the heck do you want to do with that old thing!"

Harry snorted and tried not to laugh out loud. "The Hat doesn't belong to me; don't stay stupid things like that. You very well know it was created by Godric Gryffindor to sort the students of Hogwarts, thus it belongs to the school. But there's something I want from it."

Phineas shrugged carelessly and pointed behind Dumbledore's desk. "Up there on the highest shelf. The thing's sleeping because it's not the beginning of the school year but since I sometimes hear the old man talk with it I know it'll wake up somehow."

Harry nodded and walked up the small set of stairs behind the desk and up to the book filled shelves. "Um, excuse me, Sorting Hat?" he called out softly, and then repeated himself a little louder when all he got as a response was a loud snore.

When the second attempt didn't work, he took out his wand and grunted a spell that was surely going to wake the darn thing up. "Acerbus Sonitus!"

An ear-splitting noise, one resembling an orchestra of out of tune instruments, rang through the air.

"AHH! WHAT'S GOING ON!" The Sorting Hat woke up in a jump and landed in Harry's outstretched arms. "Who are you! How dare you wake me up like that!"

Harry rolled his eyes and waited for it to stop ranting. "Are you quite finished? I have to talk with you."

The Hat shut up and eyed him suspiciously before it slowly nodded. "Good," Harry muttered and put it on; it stayed on his head instead of falling in front of his eyes grotesquely.

He shuddered when he felt the probing hat trying to see his locked thoughts and decided it was better not to hide anything from it. As soon as the Occlumency wall was brought down, he heard the exclamation of shock and a swear coming from the Sorting Hat, which surprised and amused Harry: he had never heard it cuss before so it was kind of funny.

After that particular display of bewilderment the room fell silent and Harry was left standing and letting the hat search through his mind and memories of the past.

"You have quite the disturbing set of memories, young man. A great knowledge for your age, and you value friendship from the bottom of your heart; Rowena and Helga would be proud of that. But you are a walking contradiction, my boy! You possess an unlimited amount of courage and loyalty, yet you are as cunning as a Slytherin can get. You are powerful yet you do not strive for greatness. I never thought I would one day sit on the head of a Slytherinesque heir of Godric Gryffindor. Where to put you?..."

“HEY! I’m not here to be sorted!” Harry snapped roughly.

The Sorting Hat gave the impression of blushing impishly and it muttered an apology. “Sorry, it’s a habit of mine, you know... Anyway, you want something I have furiously guarded for hundreds of years which not even the Headmaster is aware of its presence. But you are worthy, as my other self so openly gave it to you in the infamous Chamber of Secrets. Of an enemy you made an ally, a powerful one at that, I wish you the best of luck in your quest. I will keep this meeting of ours a secret. Farewell, Harry Potter.”

The Sorting Hat became oddly silent and Harry took it off; the eyes and mouth had completely disappeared, meaning that the hat had gone back to sleep again. The boy plunged his hand in the hat and, after a few minutes of searching, he smiled and gripped something solid. “Ah, there it is.”

Phineas Nigellus was looking in his direction with a childish interest and hummed in contemplation as Harry took out, by the handle, a sword covered with red gems. “Hmm, so this is the famous Gryffindor sword. I heard rumors about it but I never thought I’d see it.”

Harry spared a glance at Nigellus and gripped the sleeping hat with his free hand. “Wingardium Leviosa.”

The Sorting Hat was easily replaced where it belonged and Fawkes joined Harry who was now in front of the interested portrait. “That sword is fascinating. Care to levitate it so I can have a better look?”

Harry shrugged and levitated it until it stopped at Nigellus’ eye level. “Hmmm, truly intriguing. I once heard a rumor that this sword possessed a hidden power. I wonder if it’s true...”

Harry lifted an eyebrow. “Oh? Is this true? I never heard about such a rumor. In my world, the only time I used it was to kill the Basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets, which I did rather crudely with the sword.”

“ I won’t even ask,” Phineas deadpanned as Harry took his possession back.

Fawkes thrilled and the green eyed boy turned around. "Hedwig!"

Surely, his familiar was back and waiting for him, perched on Dumbledore's desk. Harry excitedly accepted the letter she was carrying and patted the white owl, promising a good treat for both her and Nagini, who was now probably on her way back or waiting for him somewhere near Hagrid's hut.

"A letter from an ally?" Phineas asked curiously.

Harry shrugged and smirked. "Maybe. But it'll be tricky."

Phineas smirked himself. "You have a good head on your shoulders; I believe you can do anything you set your mind to. Who are you trying to recruit, if it isn't too much to ask?"

"The Centaurs, for now; like I said: they're tricky. But I'll have to talk to the other creatures in the Forbidden Forrest later."

The ancient Headmaster whistled in amazement. "Big plan you got there. Good luck."

Harry nodded silently and left the office, leaving no trace of him having being there. He now had two more allies: the Sorting Hat, which promised to keep his secrets, and Phineas Nigellus, who could tell him what the Order talked about privately in Dumbledore's office since he could change portraits and find him anywhere in Hogwarts.

Hedwig had gone back to the Owlery, Fawkes stayed behind on its perch in the office and he was now going outside to retrieve Nagini, who deserved a good break. He didn't dare read the letter right now in case someone, more like a certain Potions Master or caretaker, surprised him and asked him to hand it to them. "I hope he said yes..." Harry whispered to himself, his green eyes full of hope.

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Everything was eerily silent when Harry was finally able to exit Hogwarts –after reducing his new weapon- alone and wait beside Hagrid’s hut. He narrowed his eyes in suspicion but proceeded to call Nagini through what Salazar had referred to as “the link” between them.

His arms were covered but he didn’t need to touch the symbol on his left forearm for it to start warming up. It felt somewhat strange, but not unpleasant, as the Dark mark would have felt.

He sensed that Nagini was close by and he turned around in the direction of the Forbidden Forest when he heard a rustle of leaves. “Nagi-!” Harry cursed loudly and ducked quickly as a red beam of offensive magic streaked past him dangerously and in an instant he had his wand in hand.

‘Bastard! A Death Eater? He’s hiding in the Forbidden Forest!’

He was about to cast a wide Disarming spell when he heard a voice cry out and choke in distress, before a cloaked body was thrown out of the forest and landed harshly on the ground in front of him; it was the Death Eater who had tried to attack him, and he was really looking beat up and dizzy.

“You let your guard down.”

Harry whirled around and prepared an attack but quickly caught himself as Firenze came halfway out of the dark forest to gaze at him with the usual mystifying expression.

“I felt Nagini through the bond we share; I thought it was her who was near,” he offered as a simple explanation.

Firenze looked down at the still sprawled figure with an angry frown but soon diverted his attention back on the mystery that was the boy in front of him. He lifted a hand and Harry finally noticed something wrapped around the muscular arm of the Centaur.

“Nagini!”

The only surprise Firenze showed at hearing him talk in Parseltongue was a single blink of the eyes as he let the eight feet snake detach herself from him to slither on her master. “Ahhh, man-sssnake! My misssion iss completed, I am in great need of sssleep.”

Harry smiled and took one of his armbands off. “You did a great job; I am proud of you. Rsssst now, dear Nagini.”

The lovely pet hissed contentedly and touched the marking on his left forearm which allowed her to go back under his skin as a moving tattoo.

Firenze blinked twice but didn’t comment on this unusual bonding method...for the moment. He watched silently as the one who named himself Harry Potter stepped toward the fallen and shaking Death Eater and took the grown man by the scruff of his collar.

“Now, let’s see with whom we have the pleasure of dealing with.” Harry took the white mask off and growled deeply in his throat, making Firenze wonder if he had been raised with dogs or wolves to sound like that, which wasn’t so far from the truth since Harry had spent most of his time with Remus Lupin after Sirius was killed; he had picked off some traits from the Werewolf Marauder.

“You know this man?” Firenze asked with hidden curiosity.

Harry glared at the lax figure and nodded. “Magnus Manx. You must’ve heard of him, surely. He was posing as the Care of Magical Creatures’ professor. One hell of a traitorous bastard too...”

Firenze was curious to see the boy letting go of the man’s robes and get up, but shocked showed on his face now as Harry muttered the second Unforgivable without a care showing on his face.

“Silencio. Crucio!”

Manx's mouth opened in a silent scream of agony and he writhed on the ground shortly before falling unconscious.

“Should I be wary of you?” Firenze asked softly, but didn't back away. “Should you be worry about the age restriction and the fact that the Ministry will know that you just used a restricted curse?”

Harry shook his head and snorted, putting his wand back in his wand holster after putting a strong binding charm on the dark servant. “No. I'm dead in this world, remember? I don't have any history file in the Ministry and my wand isn't recorded. And anyway,” Harry snorted again, “there isn't any Ministry anymore, don't you think?”

Firenze lifted an eyebrow and hummed. “I guess you are right. Are you leaving the man here? We have to go in the Forbidden Forest now; the others are waiting for us already.” The Centaur didn't wait for an answer and simply turned back into the forest, knowing that the boy would follow him even without glancing at him.

Harry was quick to follow but he gave Firenze a confused look once he fell in step with the half-beast. “Right now? Who are the others? I never thought things would go this fast.”

Firenze glanced down at him solemnly. “Haven't you read the letter Bane sent you? Everything was written on it.”

Harry shrugged sheepishly. “I didn't have any time to read it. I was only waiting for Nagini when you showed up, but I don't mind doing this right now. What made Bane react so fast?”

Firenze sighed. “He'll never admit it, but he was really surprised to receive a letter from a human. Maybe it was the mix of seriousness in the letter, of knowledge and the fact that you do not act like Dumbledore that made him think about it. But I think his mind was made when he surprised four Death Eaters who were lurking in our territory; needless to say they did not survive the encounter. It was a mistake from Voldemort to let his Death Eaters wander in a taken land which does not belong to him; he acted brashly and it made Bane change his mind about the neutrality, I think.”

Harry nodded in understanding: he had addressed Bane with all the respect he deserved, so now he had the chance to be respected by Bane. "Are there going to be a lot of Centaurs? I also wanted to ask Aragog and Mosag to join us, though this plan will prove to be tricky."

Firenze smiled tightly. "If you succeed into creating this alliance, we may be able to help you with that. As for now, you will have to speak with the Council. It is composed of twenty of us, from five separate clans all residing in different parts of this vast forest. The rest of the clans are all here too, though, so for the moment you will have to stay by me. Some Centaurs are older than Bane and even more inured to the old tradition that is human-hating, as impossible as this may sound. But you don't have to worry; I am a part of the Council and I will be on your side from the beginning of the negotiations. It probably won't last long either, a couple of human hours maximum; we have other things to do, like punishing the Death Eaters who foolishly wander around and attack any animals they come in contact with just for the fun of it," Firenze said with conviction, and Harry was glad to have such a good friend and ally in him.

Harry soon heard heavy talking and arguing and Firenze slowed down and fell in a protective yet dignified stance. "You better not talk to any of the clan members yet, just in case, until you speak with the Council," the Centaur advised, and Harry took the advice wisely. And he did good to listen to Firenze because they stopped in a well guarded clearing.

The heavily armed Centaurs watched him warily as Firenze passed by them, bodies all tense and ready to attack at any moment; the prospect of having a human in their midst was probably horrifying them.

Harry nodded at them respectfully and followed his friend, missing the surprised looks they gave to his retreating back. "A polite and wise human. Now I've seen everything. But he's so young; how did he make leader Bane call for a Council meeting?" one of the guards asked gruffly.

The other four shrugged obviously before tensing again and going back to their post.

Harry was stunned at the number of Centaurs present in the clearing and he was sure there were more hidden in the shadows of the forest. Obviously, he was now the center of attention or disgust, depending on their philosophy of humans.

There must've been at least a hundred of them that he could see and was about to comment on their great number but he remembered Firenze's advise and kept his mouth closed.

Some clans were different and easily distinguishable; some Centaurs were a reddish color, some more on the blonde side, other had black bodies. Harry found this fascinating, and even more the fact that there seemed to be youngsters half-hidden behind their parents but peeking at him with awe and curiosity only young ones could have.

Some clearly wanted to come closer to him, probably never having seen a human before, but they were being restrained by older clan members.

Harry was feeling rather childish himself at this very moment, as crazy as it sounded, and he sent a beaming smile at the wide eyed young Centaurs and then at Firenze, who couldn't help but let a chuckle escape his lips.

The older ones around him looked perplexed and nearly lost their grips on their offspring. Some giggled, to their parents' horror and some did not hide the fact that they were openly studying him with interest; Harry made sure to try to talk to them if this meeting ended in a good note.

For now, he let Firenze stir him aside and he nodded respectfully to them also before following his friend.

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Harry fidgeted under the scrutinizing stares but soon got used to it and sat more comfortably on the flat rock they had provided for him. Firenze was the only one standing beside him and the other Council members were spread in a half circle in front of them.

“You are late,” one of them stated gravely and Firenze bent his head at the bronze colored, older looking Centaur.

“My apologies. The boy was attacked by one of the Evil One’s servants who was hiding in our Forest; we took care of him.”

The Council let out outraged cries and thumped their hooves angrily on the ground. Bane lifted a hand and silence came back, although the atmosphere was now filled with tension. “Voldemort is indeed starting to get more daring and uncaring of our customs. It is mainly for our children’s future that I changed my mind and decided to give you a chance. However, I cannot say that the letter you sent me, or rather the way you sent it to me, has left me indifferent. You will have to say only the truth, boy, because this will be your first and last chance to talk to the Council if you dare lie.”

Harry nodded and took this as his cue to start talking. “Thank you, Bane, for this chance you and your comrades are giving me. It’s an honor. I guess I will begin from the start, thus telling you the story of my life.”

Bane nodded gravely and Harry told and told; things that were hard to talk about as well as happy moments. He included Salazar from now and the Basilisk from his Chamber of Secrets, how Nagini came to be with him when the one from this world still obeyed Voldemort, Imperio or not. How he got his tattoos and he even let Nagini out and spoke to her in Parseltongue; it didn’t come as a surprise since he’d just told them about his second year and how he had come to be some kind of heir of Salazar Slytherin as well as Gryffindor’s. But they didn’t care about such details.

“So, you say you defeated him in your world.”

Harry looked at a reddish coated Centaur who was sporting a grey beard and he nodded. “Yes. He’s as mortal as we are and I have the advantage here even if he hasn’t disappeared temporarily in 1981.”

“And why is that?” another Centaur, this one named Alta, asked as if he was testing the boy. “He must be more powerful here because, as you just said, he has never been temporarily eliminated.”

Harry thought about it. “True, I may not be as powerful as he is here but he doesn’t know me as I know him. He’ll probably discover my true identity but he doesn’t know my true potential. Plus, I’m veering a lot of his allies on my side; Salazar will be a big loss to his forces and my Nagini will take care of his. I can enter his mind without being detected and know what his plans will be before he acts on them. I also completely master the Patronus spell to repel Dementors.”

Firenze was silent beside him and, after thinking about something, he called Harry on it. “And what about the blood protection bestowed upon you by your mother that activated in your first year against the deranged professor?”

Harry let out a little surprised sound. “I never thought about that! Voldemort got my blood in my fourth year thus canceling the effects but it might still work here. Good point, Firenze.”

When he turned his head to look back at the Council his breath almost caught in his throat; one of the elders was standing directly in front of him and staring at him as if studying him and searching for something in his very soul. He hadn’t even heard him approach!

Nonetheless, Harry stared back without blinking or flinching, though mentally wondering why he was being so scrutinized all of a sudden.

The bluish coated elder in front of him was the first to blink and move away. Harry didn’t know why but Firenze let out an almost inaudible breath of relief after the stare-down.

“He is worthy.”

Harry closed his mouth after the old one spoke to his comrades.

Bane frowned. “You cannot make the decision alone, Stratos. The entire Council must agree.”

The one called Stratos nodded good-naturedly and addressed Harry. "We will now come to a decision. Why don't you walk around for now? The young ones were quite curious about you, so maybe you can talk with them. Don't worry, no harm will come upon you."

Harry nodded gratefully at Stratos and he said goodbye to Firenze.

...

Harry was still being eyed warily by some of the clan members, mostly the males, but the females, whom he had never seen before, gave him trusting looks.

The young ones, more courageous, sauntered giddily to him and circled him; they were mostly taller than him and their built was almost as impressive as the adults'.

"Hello! So you're the one who called forth a Council meeting? A human?" a male one asked curiously and Harry knew it wasn't meant to be an insult so he smiled.

"Yes. Someone has to prevent Voldemort from taking over the world now, don't they?"

The children laughed.

"I'm sure Master Firenze could beat that nasty man no problem!" a voice piped up in the laughter and it died down. They all stared at a young, now blushing, female with a blond coat.

The males snickered at her expression after she realized that everyone had heard her outburst.

Harry didn't understand why they were taunting her so he called them on it. One of the males, who introduced himself as Orion, answered the silent question written on Harry's face. "This is Vega. She's got a crush on Master Firenze. Don't you, Vega?" he taunted again when she reddened even more.

“Stop mocking me, Orion!” she whined, and when Orion started to laugh at her expense she growled and kicked him stiffly on his side with her rear legs.

“OW!”

Harry winced when they all started to laugh together, noting that he should always try to stay on their good side; they were more robust than him.

“Vega, is it?”

The young female stopped laughing and nodded.

“Does Firenze know how you feel?” Harry couldn’t help but ask.

Since it was impossible to get any redder, she answered: “Master Firenze probably knows since he’s very wise. I don’t think he’ll do anything, though. I’m too young for him,” she muttered dejectedly.

Harry lifted an eyebrow. “Too young? How old are you? And Firenze?”

The males looked awed that Harry called Firenze by his name without the Master title.

“Oh, Master Firenze is a hundred and thirty-one years old. He’s one of the youngest members of the Council, if not the youngest,” Vega spoke up, admiration laced in her voice. “I’m only fifty-six years old.”

Both eyebrows of Harry’s shot up in astonishment. “Fifty-six! That’s old in human standards.”

It was the young ones’ turn to be surprised. “Is it?” Orion asked for the group.

“Yes. Humans reach adulthood at eighteen years old. I’m seventeen, but ever since I’ve told everyone of my true identity they all seem to

be treating me like a kid. I hate it. Anyway, most of us don't reach the hundred, but there are a few exceptions. Wizards live longer than muggles; Albus Dumbledore is a little more than a hundred years old, though not as old as Firenze, I'm certain, and Nicholas Flamel, the Wizard Alchemist, is more than six hundred and thirty years old and still going strong because of his Philosopher Stone."

Harry explained Flamel's story and the Centaurs understood.

"Hm, we don't need such a stone. I think the eldest, Master Heracles, is around eight hundred years old. We live long if we're not involved in a war or injured beyond healing capability. That's why we prefer neutrality," one named Mathias answered.

"Really? I never thought-"

"Harry Potter."

The wizard jumped slightly, as well as the young ones.

"Firenze! I swear, your stealth ability will be the death of me."

Firenze gazed at him amusedly, which awed the children and made Vega sigh. "I apologize but I had to tell you that the Council agreed to create an Alliance. The news is being passed around so you will be able to walk around freely in the forest."

Harry was ecstatic. "That's wonderful news! Thank the Council for me, would you?"

Firenze smiled and ushered the children away, to their great disappointment. Harry didn't miss the glance Vega sent to the Master before trotting away and he chuckled. Firenze merely blinked and stirred the boy away. "Let us be on our way back to Hogwarts now. It has been three hours already and your friends will wonder where you have been."

Harry wisely chose not to comment and changed the subject. "Soo...do you know about Vega's infatuation for you?"

Harry chuckled at the disturbed face Firenze gave him. "Of course; it cannot be more obvious. But she is too young, although she will grow up to be quite a stunning female."

Harry snorted. "Age doesn't count when love is involved. In some continents, girls often marry older men like their teachers, for example. I'm not saying you two start being together right now; it can be a promise for in a couple of years, when she's old enough."

Firenze didn't answer so Harry knew he got the Centaur good.

The half-beast, half-human rasped his throat when they arrived at the border of the forest near Hagrid's hut; the Death Eater wasn't there anymore.

"You will be able to communicate with us by owl or snake, it is your choice. We will ask the forest's owls if they want to cooperate. Also, do not worry about Aragog and Mosag. The Council said that they would deal with this matter personally."

Harry was clearly grateful and bid his friend goodbye before exiting the Forbidden Forest and running to the nearest hidden passageway that led inside the castle.

When Harry was certain he was on his quarters' floor he opened the portrait by a few centimeters and held his breath as McGonagall and Flitwick, who was almost running to keep up with her, walked down the corridor.

Harry heard some of their conversation and just had to smirk.

"So, he is being held prisoner by Aurors in Hogwarts' High Security Tower? I'm still wondering how he ended up beaten and bound like he was when they found him near Hagrid's hut!" Flitwick squeaked.

Minerva stopped momentarily and Harry closed the secret door a little more.

“I don’t know. Almost gave poor Hagrid a heart attack, though, when he spotted Manx. But he was really well bound; it took three Aurors to figure out how to undo the spell. The traitor is still unconscious, though.”

Flitwick hummed and they resumed their walk. “On a lighter note, do you know if Albus has been able to talk to young Harry?” the Charms professor asked with curiosity.

“No. Albus isn’t able to floo in the boy’s quarters for some reason. We think that he’s hiding in there. It’s been a couple of hours now; I swear that boy is as hard-headed as his father was.”

“How about getting in by the entry portrait?”

The conversation was starting to fade.

“It’s something that’s frustrating Albus. Harry changed his password and hasn’t told anyone what it was. Something about not even the portrait being able to decipher the password...”

They rounded a corner and Harry could finally snicker softly before taking a peek in the corridor; there wasn’t anyone anymore and he quickly exited the secret passageway and walked in the direction of the portrait guarding his rooms.

He was about to utter his password when-

“Harry...”

The boy’s eyes widened momentarily and he turned around.
“Sirius...Remus...”

They were looking at him wearily, probably just having being released from the infirmary. They had also apparently been worried sick about him and Harry was overcome with a sense of guilt.

‘The only family I have left...’ he thought sadly, and then lifted his head and gave them a soft, yet piercing jade green stare.

“Sirius, Remus, I think it’s time we talk.”

Finally, another chapter done! (pants and sags like a puddle of goo in her chair)

Next chapter will include the Prophecy (I’ve not forgotten about it) and “Marauder conspiracy” against Dumbledore.

R&R!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos ;)

Chapter 19: The protectors

It took a few seconds for Sirius and Remus to grasp what Harry had just said but when they finally did they stayed silent, knowing that things couldn't be that easy. They did well to follow their instinct because the dark haired boy gave them a pointed look as he walked in front of the portrait guarding his quarters again.

They just stood there, apprehensive and clueless, until he opened his mouth.

"Sslytherin and Gryffindor united," he hissed, and both Marauders jumped backwards, suspicion and fear written all over their face.

Harry didn't mind them and entered his quarters to get more comfortable. A few minutes after he was in and they still hadn't entered he showed his face out of the portrait, surprising them out of their stupor. "Well, are you getting in or not? I'm warning you, though; if you turn around now you will not have this opportunity again."

Sirius and Remus eyed each other first with uncertainty, and then with resolution. With one mighty step they were in, yet they still jumped when the portrait closed behind them. Now they knew what Harry meant by treating him like a kid, unlike the mysterious and dangerous persona that was James Evans; they sure felt threatened now, in the inescapable room, and by Harry Potter, no less. Both boys were indeed one and the same.

"Um..." Sirius rasped his throat; his voice was shaky. "Since when?...What was...Why?...How?" The right question just wouldn't come to his mind and Harry had to lift an eyebrow at the usually blunt man.

He snorted. "Where's your Gryffindor courage, Sirius? Forgot it in your bedside drawer this morning? Oh yea, that's right; you were in the hospital wing because of whatever stupid rescue plan Dumbledore made up as you were all being injured!" Harry sneered and then caught himself and breathed in deeply.

“Why don’t we sit down? This is going to take a while. Do you want something to drink?”

Sirius and Remus fidgeted in the entrance and looked around a tad uncomfortably at his choice of colors: a deep gold for Gryffindor, which was acceptable, but the deep green reminded them too much of the Slytherin house, which made them fidget again when it reminded them of the Parselmouth ability that was unexpectedly demonstrated.

Truth is: the Gryffindor red reminded Harry too much of blood whereas the green was a calmer color and not the vibrant green of the Killing Curse.

They were surprised at the more gentle tone of voice Harry used when he invited them to sit down, which they did, and they declined the offer of a drink. “So Harry, are you going to tell us how you can talk in Parseltongue?” Remus asked out of the blue while eyeing the green eyed boy who was retrieving something from a cupboard.

Both men were curious to see Harry put down a Pensieve on the table in front of them. “You must understand that I’ll need your loyalty and that you will need to understand yourselves before I can even think about showing you my life,” Harry started without further ado. “That’s why I will show you your other selves first, bits and pieces of what I remember, and feelings we all felt when we were together.”

Sirius and Remus startled when he took his wand out and pointed it against his temple, only to drag a rather small amount of silver threads out and dropping them in the Pensieve. The empty bowl glowed for a moment and then Harry backed away with a pained expression etched on his face; he had dug deeply to get those memories, almost out of his heart, when the wounds were still fresh even after all this time.

“I’ll leave the two of you alone, now. Call for me if you need anything; I’ll be in my room.”

The Marauders eyed the bowl in front of them and, with a renewed need to know and understand Harry, they touched the liquid at the same time and got lost in the memories of treachery, isolation, prison, hope, fear and everything in between.

...

An hour later, Harry heard sharp intakes of breath and calmly stood up from his bed. Hedwig, whom he was petting just now, followed him and perched herself on his shoulder.

He wasn't surprised to see Sirius and Remus wearing dazed, and then horror struck faces and their body lax.

"Merlin..." Sirius breathed almost inaudibly. "Azkaban, Remus. I...My other self...Azkaban! For twelve years! And –Pettigrew-!" the name was spat out of great hatred. "He cared so much for you, Harry, this other me. I could feel it. It's..."

"Indescribable," Remus finished softly, a thousand of emotions running through them both; they were still completely lax, though, in the deep green leather couch.

"I-he died for you. I acted as a shield against the Killing Curse without even hesitating," the Werewolf whispered, shaking from head to toe.

"Why? Why were you there, Harry? Why are you so intent on participating in our war when you've seen what it does first hand? Why is it that Voldemort targets you so much?" Sirius asked in one go, a tad bit frustrated and scared for the life of his Godson.

Harry sighed and muttered, as he was emptying the Pensieve, "Neither can live while the other survives..."

Sirius and Remus perked up. "What? What was that you just said? I've heard you mutter this a couple of times now," the Animagus said.

“So he never told you, figures. He must’ve thought there was no interest in the Prophecy anymore,” Harry said to himself while he emptied memories after memories in the bowl again; and this time there were a lot of them.

Both men had to gape and thought that the boy was literally emptying his entire mind out until Harry stopped and collapsed on the couch in front of them, panting slightly out of exhaustion and looking at them with a somewhat dazed expression.

“Go on. I’ll take a nap; this is going to take a lot of time and there’s no way I’m coming with you. Some of those memories are too painful to bear.” Harry got up sluggishly and left both men behind, who didn’t hesitate this time to enter the memories.

.....

“I grow impatient, Lucius. I need reports. Your son is an imbecile; he should have stayed in Hogwarts to gather information,” a voice drawled dangerously and Lucius Malfoy, kneeling in the Circle of the most powerful and loyal Death Eaters, fidgeted nervously and kept quiet.

“Now he isn’t worth anything to me. Maybe I should punish him for his idiocy,” Voldemort said to himself with a sadistic smile, which made the older Malfoy fidget again.

“Do as you see fit, Master. But...May I- may I make a suggestion to my great Lord?” he waited anxiously for the blow to come but it never did.

“...You may.”

Malfoy blinked and nodded quickly. “Maybe, to vent your ...frustrations, you could play with some muggles? There are far too many anyway.”

The red eyed man clapped his hands once and got up, surprising the members of his Circle. “Delightful idea. I am itching to use my wand.”

Lucius let out a silent breath of relief and put his white mask on at the same time as his colleagues, readied himself to apparate and was about to when the voice of his Master made him freeze.

“Oh, and Lucius?”

“Y-yes Master?”

“Crucio!...Finite Incantatem. This is for trying to divert my attention away from your son. You are lucky I have other people to take care of, like –Severus Snape-, the traitor spy, and the boy who dared confront me, James Evans. They will regret their choice of not following me. Pettigrew!”

The short man with beady and wild eyes jumped and almost threw himself on his knees. “Yes, my Lord?”

“Bring me my cloak; I am going out.”

The rat did as asked without hesitation.

“Good man. Ah, I really did miss your loyal services all these years.”

“My Lord is too good. I do not deserve such praise.” Pettigrew bowed as low as he could.

Voldemort let out a chilling bark of laughter and turned around. “Let us be on our way.”

Lucius grit his teeth in jealousy of all the attention Pettigrew, the ex-Gryffindor, was receiving but once again kept quiet and apparated with the rest of the Circle. When he arrived, his Lord was already wreaking havoc and having fun scaring the entire muggle neighborhood by himself.

“You’re so jealous, Malfoy! You got it good today!” Bellatrix taunted and snickered behind him.

Lucius growled and sneered, taking advantage of his Lord's inattention to send a stunner in her direction, which she evaded with another snicker. One day, all this taunting would be the death of her.

“Stop babbling and start killing. Put that mouth of yours to good use, for the love of Grindewald!” the blonde man growled and left the trio of Lestrage, Bellatrix, Rabastan and Rodolphus, plus Regulus Black alone to fend for themselves.

He needed to vent his frustration and stalked away from the Circle members, nearly trampling Peter as he passed by; the thin man, aged by Azkaban, let out a squawk of indignation and almost cowered away.

On his part, Voldemort was having fun; according to his version of fun, that is. One would think he was trying to break a record of killing muggles in as less time as possible.

House after house he blew apart the hinges, not leaving any traces of hope for survival to the scared inhabitants. Men, women, children; every living thing in every house was tortured and killed on the spot.

Houses exploded and imploded because of the use of too many Unforgivables and dangerous curses.

After killing an old couple, the Dark Lord made his way to the next house; it was the epitome of perfection.

It was making him sick.

Perfectly mowed lawn, perfect little flower-bed bordering the perfectly painted house. Ugh!

Voldemort waved his wand in a flourish move and the door all but exploded. Whines and cries sounded from inside and the red eyed man smirked sadistically.

There was no one on the first floor so he took his time to get upstairs, just to scare the muggles a little longer.

He opened door after door and when he arrived at what looked like the master bedroom he met the end barrel of a rifle.

“G-go away, freak! Monster!”

The Dark Lord lifted an eyebrow and in one wave of his wand the gun had disappeared and the man, who was trying to protect his wife and child, stumbled backwards with a red face.

“You dare talk to me like this, you filthy Mudblood? I am LORD VOLDEMORT! I do as I please, I kill whom I please...And now, you are next on my list. You should be happy that I will let you die quickly, Mudblood. Normally I let the man of the house choose my first victim...Hm, it is tempting, to make you decide who I will kill first between your wife and kid...”

“GET AWAY FROM US, YOU MONSTER!” the woman shouted, desperately trying to save her son by leaning as much as she could against the farthest wall of the bedroom; it was a pathetic attempt to do so, and they knew, but when threatened a mind never worked as well as it should.

Talk to the Dark Lord like that didn't help their cause one bit and the evil wizard sneered in rage. His eyes blazed with an evil glint and he lifted his wand.

“AVADA KE - NOOOO!”

Voldemort gasped and brought his hand to his throat while the muggles held their breath, completely confused at what had just happened.

“Mum, did the freak's voice just change?” the boy whispered to his mother, who shushed him promptly. “Shhh! He's distracted. Let's get out of here!” The woman led her son quickly towards the door and the husband followed as fast as he could.

Voldemort wasn't giving any sign of having seen them flee, or he simply didn't care. That voice hadn't been his, just now. Someone had done the impossible: use Legilimency on him! But how!

The voice had been familiar. His red eyes narrowed considerably when he caught on; it was the voice of the boy who had escaped his grasp, the Griffin Animagus James Evans.

When he felt that the presence was still lurking in his mind he concentrated on it and saw a flash of someone that looked a lot like Evans, yet somebody else whom he couldn't quite replace.

When the presence gave the impression of being surprised when his intentions were discovered, The Dark Lord shoved him out of his mind as roughly as he could. He was interested in the boy but invading his mind was really surpassing the limit. Now, he was even more interested in this mysterious person.

"He changed. Polyjuice, maybe? No, he stayed in headquarters far too long... A spell, then?" Voldemort asked himself calculatingly. "His new appearance was far too familiar to be just a coincidence. I have to know! To whom does he make me think of!"

Riddle stalked out of the house without even destroying it, something else more important on his mind. He recalled his Death Eaters, who almost whined at being so hastily stopped from having their fun with the muggle police cars which had just arrived, and Apparated back to his mansion without even another word.

Travers gave an odd look at Avery. "What was that all about? I've never seen our Lord in such a hurry before. Something interesting must've come up."

Avery was as perplexed as him and they regrouped in the middle of the street.

"Morsmordre!" Malfoy cried out, and they all disappeared with a loud POP after the skull and snake appeared in the dark sky.

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Back in Hogwarts, a boy woke up with a pained gasp, barely containing a scream. Harry panted and tried to shake off the effects of being so violently pushed out of Tom's mind, a sheen of sweat covering his face and chest.

"Hot...Too hot..." Harry muttered and took off his damp clothes; a fever was started to grip him and he went to his bathroom cabinet to down an entire vial of Fever-Relieving potion. It helped greatly but he was still pretty shaken.

Shakily, he put another shirt on and ignored, for the moment, Nagini, who was trying to get his attention on his arm. "Masster, your sskin iss too hot. You are not well."

Harry sat down on his bed once he was changed and tried to sort his thoughts. 'Tom doesn't know who I truly am but he saw my true appearance. It's a matter of time until he finds out who I really am.'

He sighed tiredly and leaned on his bed; he really needed a potion to counter the after-effects of the Curses that Tom had used against the muggles but he didn't have any with him.

Strolling around the castle and asking Snape for such potions was out of the question.

"Excuse me, Snape, but I just mentally experienced the Reductor curse, a lot of Blasting curses, one or two Entrail-Expelling curses and one too many Cruciatus curses. Could I have a potion to relieve the massive headache and the pain it caused me?" Harry snorted ironically at the thought of asking that to the Potions Master who, at the present time, trusted him as much as Pettigrew could be trusted.

He sighed frustratingly and sat up, mussing his already wild mop of hair and his breath caught in his throat when he noticed the people standing in his bedroom's doorway.

"You did not just hear that," Harry muttered, but it was in vain.

Sirius and Remus were both frozen in the doorway.

‘I must be more tired than I thought; I didn’t even hear them come out of the Pensieve.’

“For how long have you been standing there?” the boy whispered hoarsely.

Both men couldn’t trust their voice at the moment but they surprised Harry when, in two big strides, they were on their knees in front of the Boy-Who-Lived and hugging him as if their lives depended on it.

“Oh Merlin, Harry!” Sirius choked, trying for all he was worth not to cry.

“We’ve been standing there long enough, Harry,” Remus answered shakily while petting his hair affectionately.

Harry was too astonished, confused and tired to respond and, for once, just let it go and embraced them back fiercely. “Sirius! Remus!”

They weren’t his, but they were a start to his new life; they understood him.

Remus stepped back and put a hand on Sirius’ shoulder. “Padfoot, make Harry lie in bed. I’ll harass Snape for some Pain Relieving potions so God help him if he doesn’t want to give them to me.” The Werewolf stalked out of the room hurriedly with a determined frown and was out and on his way to the dungeons in mere minutes.

Sirius did as Remus said and almost shuddered; Harry blinked at him from beneath the mountain of blankets the Animagus put him under and Sirius smiled warmly. “It’s just that I wouldn’t want to be Snape right now.”

Harry chuckled weakly. “Sirius, you never would want to be Snape. You hate his guts.”

Sirius smirked. "Too true. Try to get some sleep, Emeralds. Remus will return shortly, I'm sure."

Harry lifted an eyebrow and mouthed 'Emeralds?'

Sirius played the game and mouthed back 'your eyes'.

Harry smiled softly and, unable to fight the call of Morpheus, he fell asleep not too long after.

Sirius sighed, conjured a chair and sat down beside his Godson's bed, watching him sleep like a protective parent. "I'll watch over you, Harry. Always. You'll never be the Godson I lost and I'll never be the Godfather you lost, as Remus will never be yours, but I promise you this: we'll get through this together and we will forge our future together from now on."

"Yes we will."

Sirius startled and Remus found himself at wand point, until the Animagus realized his friend had returned.

Remus stayed silent and gave the vials to Sirius, who in turn woke Harry up to make him drink them all. The boy blinked half-heartedly at Remus and promptly fell asleep again due to the massive dose of potions he took.

He hadn't really needed the Sleeping potion because it didn't have any effect on him so Remus hadn't asked for this one.

With one last look at the sleeping boy, the remaining Marauders stepped out of the bedroom and sat back on the couch. "What did Snape say when you asked him for his best potions?" Sirius asked curiously.

"He didn't really have anything to say when I shoved him against a wall. He gave me the usual evil-eye, trademark sneer and suspicious gaze but he was wise enough to know to shove any comments he

had up his arse,” Remus simply answered, making Sirius almost barf the Butterbeer he had just conjured.

Padfoot gave him a look of total bafflement and Remus shrugged, unable to completely hide the devilish smirk from his lips. “What? You mess with my cub, you mess with me. You kind of said so yourself back there, when you were alone with Harry. I think it’s the first time I’ve heard something so profound coming from you.”

Sirius almost blushed from the comment but reinforced the fact; anybody who messed with his Godson would become an enemy.

“...What do you think Harry dreamt about before he first woke up? What did Voldemort do to make him so tired?” Remus asked out of the blue, and Sirius cussed. “Shit! I forgot to ask him. I guess we were too caught up in the moment. We’ll have to ask him when he wakes up.”

“...Uh, Remus? By the way, how the hell did you come in? You’re no Parselmouth,” the Animagus added with a suspicious tone.

Remus looked sheepish. “Before going out I transfigured a quill into a rock and blocked the entry. It was small so it was practically impossible to make the difference between a closed entry and an open one. I know it was wrong to do that but I didn’t want to make Harry get up. I think the portrait was mad with me though because it quivered when I touched it.”

Sirius rolled his eyes.

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“Harry? Harry wake up! Emeralds?” Sirius tapped softly on his Godson’s cheeks to wake him up.

The boy let out a muffled groan and in an instant he was sitting up and pointing his wand towards the startled Sirius. The day’s events caught up with his sleep induced mind and he carefully lowered the

weapon. "Sorry Sirius. It's a habit and since you and Remus are the first people I let in I guess I forgot myself."

After breathing in a big gulp of air, Sirius quirked his lips. "It's okay, kid. Man, I wouldn't want to be one of your enemies!" he joked, but soon turned serious, catching Harry's attention. "I'm sorry to wake you up like this but Dumbledore is calling for a meeting in the Great Hall. Remus doesn't know the exact reason. He just came up here to tell me to wake you up and he went back down. We figured you would like to be kept informed."

Harry nodded tiredly, all trace of adrenaline gone and he silently put his clothes on. Sirius watched him intently and took a step towards him, almost hesitant to touch him.

Harry knew what he wanted and lifted his left arm. "Yes Sirius, this is Nagini. Say hello to my Godfather, Nagini. Don't bite," he then hissed, scaring Sirius half to death when Nagini slithered "out" of his arm, hissed in the man's direction and went back under Harry's skin.

Harry laughed shortly and put his armbands on, effectively hiding the snake. "She just said hello, Sirius. I asked her not to hurt you. I'll have to present her to Remus also. And this is Hedwig, my very first familiar. Though you must already know because of the memories."

Hedwig flew to her master's shoulder and hooted. Sirius smiled and petted the snowy owl. "We should go, Harry."

The young man nodded and both were off to the Great Hall. "So Sirius, you really don't have any idea of what this is about?"

The Animagus shrugged. "Remus said that the old man was pretty shaken this morning, so Voldemort probably showed up somewhere. It's been a while since we haven't heard of him so it wouldn't surprise me. If it's a Dark Lord matter, though, I'm sure Dumbledore will call a private Order reunion."

Sirius gave a disgruntled look at nothing in particular. "I wish you could go. I wish I could tell you what's going on during those

meetings but we're under an oath. No one has the right to talk about them outside the office."

Harry didn't return the disgruntled look and instead chuckled conspiratorially. "Don't worry about that. I already have a secret messenger within Dumbledore's office who is way more than ready to tell me everything that's being said there."

"Oh?" Sirius was curious to know who it was.

Harry winked. "Phineas Nigellus."

The Animagus' eyes widened and he chuckled. "You got into Dumbledore's office, didn't you? You little trickster! How did you do it? I didn't see that in your memories."

Harry quirked his lips. "The gargoyle didn't want to let me in but it doesn't matter; I have Fawkes on my side. I needed to go there to retrieve something that belonged to me in the first place."

Padfoot thought about it for a moment as they were nearing the Great Hall. "Back in your second year... The sword you were wielding in the Chamber of Secrets?"

Harry nodded. "Yes. It can be useful. My circle of allies is growing."

Sirius was about to ask about that but they were already in front of the opened doors of the Hall. "Well, I guess you'll have to sit with your Gryffindor friends. It must be so hard for you..."

The glint in Harry's eyes dimmed and he smiled sadly at his Godfather. "Let's go, Sirius." It was a way to close the subject and both men went to their respective places.

Snape gave Harry one of his best sneers and calculating look as he made his way to the students' table, which Harry expertly ignored. 'He's probably asking himself why Remus needed all these potions...' Harry thought while sitting down next to a silent Ron.

The redhead's eyes, though, were screaming at him: 'Where the hell have you been all this time!' But Harry also ignored him in favor of listening to what Dumbledore had to say.

"Everyone, I fear the Dark Lord has restarted his activity."

Panicked whispers broke out in the Great Hall but McGonagall made them stop by making red sparks come out of her wand.

"Thank you Minerva. Now, as I was saying, the Dark Lord has attacked a muggle town just a couple of hours ago and he has killed an entire street worth of its inhabitants. We have to stop him; he is getting quite uncontrollable. Our Aurors said that he behaved quite strangely, though, because when they arrived he was already leaving the area and looking quite agitated."

Mad-Eye Moody grunted. "Were there any survivors? Anyone who could tell us what happened and why he left in such a rush?"

Dumbledore nodded gravely. "Actually, yes...Which I find quite unsettling. They were found not too far away from the crime scene and I will be personally interrogating them."

"Muggles?" Tonks asked, and Dumbledore nodded again.

Harry, on his part, was looking grimly at the Headmaster. 'I won't need Phineas to know who those muggles are.'

"...anyone who finds anything interesting as to how or why the Dark Lord acted like this, please tell me immediately. That will be all."

People started to talk animatedly and Harry was, for the most part, completely forgotten at the moment.

A deep brown owl suddenly flew to him but no one around him seemed to really take notice or care; Dumbledore and a couple of teachers and Order members sure did, though, and Remus and Sirius walked to him before the old man could open his mouth. Snape's dark eyes narrowed.

“Thank you.” Harry petted the owl coming from the Forbidden Forest and gave it a piece of food that appeared on the table, not forgetting to also treat Hedwig with a big morsel.

Harry inspected the rolled parchment but decided not to open it right now just in case.

“Harry? Who’s it from?”

The green eyed boy was thankful for his fast Quidditch reflexes when Seamus almost seized the roll from his grasp. “Sorry Seamus, it’s personal.”

“Aw Harry, you’re no fun! Is it from a girlfriend?” the Irish boy asked coyly but Harry didn’t find the matter funny and scowled darkly, which made Seamus take a step back.

“Please don’t bother my Godson, Mr. Finnegan,” Sirius interfered abruptly, catching the attention of a few students when Lupin also got involved, which he almost never did.

“Come on, Harry. You must still be tired; let’s go back to your room.”

They didn’t have the time to take two steps; Snape was in front of them, sneering, and Dumbledore was standing calmly behind them. “Is something the matter, Albus?” Remus asked quietly but with a warning tone in his voice.

“Of course there is, Lupin! I want to know why you so rudely treated me earlier to have a bunch of healing potions!” Snape spat out menacingly and Remus surprised the Potions Master by almost growling at him like a wolf would.

Sirius put a restricting hand on his friend’s shoulder and Remus calmed down and put a protective hand on Harry’s back.

“It was for me, Snape. Don’t get Remus involved into this,” Harry said stiffly, trying to get his Werewolf friend out of trouble. Sirius

hissed at him but Harry swatted his warning away. "I had a nightmare and, as you know, they can get pretty real. Remus was merely acting out of concern because I was pretty shaken up. It won't happen again. Now, if you excuse me-"

Dumbledore stopped him and tried to decipher his secrets by looking directly into his green eyes. Harry cut the connection roughly and Albus blinked. "What happened, Harry? Do you know what happened?" the old man asked with a pointed look.

Sirius and Remus couldn't help him on this one and fidgeted nervously. Was it because of something in his dream? They had seen in Harry's Pensieve: the boy had a connection with the Dark Lord because of his scar.

"I know what happened," Harry merely stated as a fact and the boy heard Minerva's intake of breath.

Snape gripped Harry's arm tightly, earning himself a growl from both Remus and Sirius and a warning glare from Harry. "Don't spread lies, boy! How could you possibly know what happened!"

Harry wrenched his arm away and sealed his lips tightly. Sirius walked in front of Harry and sent a frigid glare at Snape. "Don't ever touch my Godson like this again, Snape, or else!"

Remus took Harry's hand in his and stalked out of the Great Hall hurriedly.

"Is this some kind of rebellion, Black! Has the boy completely brainwashed you! You know something, don't you! You are withholding precious information!" Severus spat angrily but Sirius held his ground even against Dumbledore's accusing stare.

"I believe in him and because of this he believes in me and also in Remus. Include him in the Order meetings."

"You know I'm not ready to do that, Sirius," Dumbledore stated and Padfoot shrugged.

“Then it’s your loss. If you’ll excuse me.”

Snape opened his mouth but Albus lifted a hand and sighed. “I’m truly starting to regret my decision of not including Harry in this.”

Severus sneered. “I’m failing to see why Potter is so important,” he snapped at the old man, and Minerva threw him a strict look. “Severus! Watch your tone! We are all in the same boat here!”

Albus sat down and a Hufflepuff fifth year gave his place for the Headmaster. “Severus, I’m afraid this attack is directly linked to Mister Potter. I really have to talk to him.” Albus suddenly got up, a determined glint in his old eyes.

Unfortunately, as he made his way out of the Great Hall, someone else was making his way in. “Albus! It’s the Dementors! They’re attacking Hogsmeade!” Kingsley Shacklebolt panted tiredly and Pomfrey was quick to give him a piece of chocolate.

“How many, Kingsley?” Mad-Eye grunted while he took out his wand.

The worn auror gave him a grim look. “Above a hundred, that’s for sure.”

Moody’s real eye widened while the false one whirled in its socket, scaring a few students.

Albus gazed meekly at Shacklebolt. “That’s too many even for me to handle. Anyone who is able to conjure a strong Patronus step forward!”

Only about twenty people out of hundreds stepped up, most of them being Aurors and Unspeakables. Kingsley was one of them, as was Alastor, Arthur and his sons Bill and Charlie, and even Frank and Alice Longbottom, Neville’s very much sane parents. But even they looked unsure of their ability at the moment.

Albus retrieved his wand and motioned for them to follow him. Since McGonagall was in the group, Albus asked Severus, Flitwick and Sprout to take care of the students during their absence.

Rosmerta and Xiomara glanced at each other and nodded surreptitiously, backing away from the mass of people to run up the main stairway.

“Do you know where Harry’s quarters are, Xiomara?” Rosmerta panted as they ran.

“Yeah! I guess we just had the same idea! Follow me!”

They stopped in front of a painting and Xiomara gazed at the portrait with no idea what to do. “What’s his password?” Rosmerta asked and the flying instructor shrugged helplessly.

“I don’t know! Um...Open? Come on, damn you! It’s important! Open!” Xiomara cried out as she started to pound on the portrait, which didn’t budge at all under the assault. She was about to hit it again when the portrait brusquely opened.

The women gazed sheepishly at the very irate looking Sirius Black. “What?”

“Um, Sirius! We thought it would be a good thing to tell you that Dumbledore is gone to Hogsmeade with about twenty people because Dementors are attacking right now,” Hooch said in one go and Sirius cursed.

“Damn! Come in,” he rushed in and let the portrait opened for both dazed women to enter.

“Harry! Remus! Dementors in Hogsmeade!”

Those words alone were enough to make Harry and Lupin run in the living room...which Xiomara and Rosmerta were eyeing with some sort of morbid fascination. Rosmerta mouthed ‘Slytherin and

Gryffindor colors?’ to Hooch, who could only shrug, completely clueless.

“How many Dementors?”

They were brought back to reality by Harry, who was looking ready to go to war, his wand in hand and green eyes set.

“Shacklebolt said above a hundred.”

It was Remus who swore this time and the three men nodded at each other. “Sirius, I trust you remember how to ride a broom?”

Sirius nodded dumbly and gaped when Harry handed him his Firebolt. “You and Remus will fly to Hogsmeade. We don’t have any time to run.”

“But what about you?” Remus asked worriedly, and yet he was eyeing the broomstick quite distrustfully and unsurely.

Harry waved a dismissive hand. “Don’t worry about me and the broom won’t bite, Remus! GO!”

The Marauders nodded quickly and opened a window. They both gripped the handle and jumped, flying away at a rapid pace. Harry snorted when he heard them let out a small scream; the Firebolt was probably too fast for them.

The boy then turned to Rosmerta and Xiomara and nodded thankfully. “I guess this means I can count on you both. We’ll talk later; close the portrait on your way out.”

He didn’t wait for an answer and threw himself out of the window, making both women scream in fear. They ran to the windowpane and their breath caught in their throat when they spotted no one on the land below, but a Griffin flying away towards Hogsmeade at a breakneck speed.

“This boy’s incredible,” Hooch stated, and Rosmerta could only nod silently, her eyes still wide and staring at the beast.

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Harry, still transformed, had no trouble to see where the Dementors were attacking in the small village; a black mass was hovering above The Three Broomsticks and every houses and shops around it.

Flying around it to get under was going to take too much time so he decided to fly right through since the Animagus ability dampened by ninety percent the effects of being in the presence of a Dementor, a fact he had learned from his Sirius.

With a couple of mighty flaps of wings he was making his way through the coldness and directly attacking any Dementor that came too near.

After a couple of excruciatingly long seconds of flying and screeching and attacking, he finally soared under the mass, a curse nearly missing him by inches. He screeched at a shaking young auror until Sirius, covered by Remus, ran to the young man and told him to stop aiming at the Griffin.

“You couldn’t have arrived at a better time Harry! We’re being over-powered!” Sirius yelled at the beast over the commotion, his wand still raised and emitting a silver light.

The auror who had been aiming at the Griffin gave Sirius a bewildered expression. “Harry! As in Harry Potter! But Dumbledore said-”

“Fuck what Dumbledore said!” Remus spat out as he joined Sirius. He looked completely exhausted and on the verge of collapsing.

‘The full moon is in two days!’ Harry remembered suddenly.

The group of Dementors was tightening around them. “Harry can help!” Sirius finished with conviction as the volunteers regrouped.

Dumbledore appeared tired but livid that Sirius and Remus had disobeyed him and brought Harry. He held his wand high and was still trying to get the soul-sucking monsters to back away; Alice Longbottom was unconscious in her husbands' arms and a few others weren't fairing so well either.

The Griffin tuned them out and shifted slightly, ruffling his wings as he examined the number of Dementors looming over them and his chances of success. Fortunately, Harry had seen worse.

He caught everyone's attention by transforming back to his human self and he cried out and gripped his scar when the mental assault started.

"No! Not Harry! Take me!"

"Stand aside girl! Foolish woman!"

Sirius and Remus held their breath in fright while the other adults panicked and watched the boy with a morbid interest; his reaction to the Dementors was too strong, it wasn't normal.

Harry set his jaw tightly and, with a mighty but shaking push, he slowly got up and brandished his shining wand upwards. "EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

For a few seconds nothing happened, and Mad-Eye was about to open his mouth when it happened; the burst of silver light was so strong that they all got thrown aside and the Dementors were all pushed away with such a force that those who were too close actually got destroyed.

Everyone shut their eyes tightly; no distinguishable shape could be seen anyway since the light was so thick. When they finally could open their eyes again they blinked away the white spots dancing in front of them...and then blinked a couple of times again to make sure that they weren't dreaming.

There wasn't one Dementor left in the sky.

A shape blurred past the awestruck and silent group, startling them, until they recollected that Harry was here with them.

But Harry wasn't really; his eyes dropped, his legs buckled from under him and what prevented him to hit the ground hard was none other than his Patronus, a huge, grim-like silver dog, to be more precise.

It startled more than one person, Sirius the most; he hadn't seen that in the Pensieve.

Another silver form growled, actually growled! As it pushed its way to Harry; it was Moony! A Patronus Moony, a Werewolf.

The real one blinked and opened his mouth. Nothing came out. Remus gazed at Sirius uncertainly but Sirius was a flabbergasted as him.

Mad-Eye growled dangerously low. "Okay. That was pretty powerful magic, even for a kid. Merlin, he has more than one Patronus! That's not normal. I want to have answers, and I want them now!"

The mad auror stalked towards Harry with the intention to wake the kid up by any means necessary when he was roughly tackled away from the unconscious boy who was fiercely protected by Padfoot and Moony silver version.

Moody fell on the ground with a dull thud and was ready to blast the daring person to pieces when another silver and imposing form towered dangerously over him, antlers swerving warningly.

"Prongs..." Sirius and Remus whispered in unison as Moody was too shocked to move.

Dumbledore lost the ability to talk as "Prongs" moved away from Alastor and made his way to Harry, only stopping a few seconds to rest his gaze on both breathless Marauders.

It nuzzled the dark haired boy gently and all three Patronuses glanced at Sirius and Remus trustingly before starting to fade.

Minerva noticed that, as the silver forms were evaporating, Harry's brightly illuminated wand was slowly going back to its original red color.

Sirius and Remus rushed to the boy as soon as they disappeared and the Animagus lifted his Godson in his arms protectively. "Moony, let's go back to the castle," Sirius muttered lowly and Remus nodded silently.

The Werewolf shook his fear of Harry's broom and took the boy in his arms, flying carefully back to the castle while Sirius transformed and followed them without a backward glance at the stunned group.

The fearful and shaking inhabitants of Hogsmeade started to come out of their hiding places and crowd around Dumbledore, who merely gazed meekly at the Order members and half unresponsive volunteers.

Another chapter done! Finally! I hope you're all satisfied, it's 20 pages long!

Next Chapter: Harry opens the letter he received in this chapter, and it's interrogation time for the surviving muggle family...and maybe for Harry too?

REVIEW!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos

Chapter 20: The need to kill

Albus Dumbledore felt wary and tired; after taking care of all the survivors of Hogsmeade and answering their millions of questions with the best of his capacities, he had had to accommodate them in dorm rooms and the like. Some people were complaining that they had no privacy anymore, that Hogwarts was big but that it was now beginning to be overpopulated and had its limits.

All in all, the tension was beginning to grate on everyone's nerves. The old man now had a headache and was trying to block the noise his comrades were making by arguing and shouting back and forth in his office about what had happened in the wizarding village. It was, of course, a private Order of the Phoenix meeting.

"I'm telling you I saw it with my own eyes! Potter, a mere child, produced three Patronuses at the same time! They were so strong even the strongest Auror and Unspeakable would pale in envy at the sight!" professor Vector, the Arithmancy teacher, shouted at the pigheaded and disbelieving Potions Master.

Snape refused to listen to their story; it was making Potter appear as a saint and Potters were no saints, in his opinion.

"Forget the fact that he has three for now and concentrate on the fact that they were rather familiar!" Mad-Eye growled and glanced meaningfully at those who knew the identity of those Patronuses.

The fact that Moody made resurface made Albus blink and forget about his headache for the moment. His eyes went from worn-out to serious and calculating in seconds. "Alastor has a point. We also have to talk to Sirius and Remus. Their behavior is no mere coincidence; they must know something that we don't. Right now I don't even know if I can fully trust them or not, that's why I didn't even bother to search for them. They must be in Harry's quarters and it's getting quite frustrating that I cannot get in," Albus muttered the last part darkly.

“What do you mean? What’s so important about the appearance of the boy’s Patronuses?” Simeon McGavin, an Unspeakable, asked dumbly.

Minerva shot a nervous look at the man but finished by answering: “They are linked to Black and Lupin directly. It isn’t common knowledge but Remus is a Werewolf-”

“I already knew that,” Simeon interrupted, “but why do you think that this Werewolf Patronus is the exact representation of Lupin?”

Snape sighed loudly and rudely in exasperation, rolling his eyes in the process. “For the love of Merlin, McGavin, you’re quite slow for an Unspeakable! Are you sure your brain hasn’t been turned to mush when you faced the Dementors?”

The Unspeakable was about to open his mouth to argue but Snape wasn’t finished. “What most people don’t know is that –Black- is an unregistered Animagus, a big black dog to be more precise. It was no coincidence if Potter’s Patronuses had this shape.”

“Black’s an Animagus! But that’s illegal not to be registered!” the ministry employee exclaimed in shock.

Minerva sighed. “Simeon, it was necessary for Black’s second identity to remain a secret. Tell me, have you ever heard of the Marauders before?”

McGavin nodded thoughtfully. “I have, but it’s really far back in my memory. They were pranksters here at Hogwarts in the seventies or so, right? Prongs, Padfoot, Moony and Wormtail? What’s that got to do with all of this?”

“Well, James Potter, Sirius Black and Remus Lupin were the Marauders,” the Transfiguration teacher answered calmly while Simeon’s eyes widened in incredulity.

“Black is Padfoot, the grim-like dog; Remus Lupin is, of course, the Werewolf Moony and James Potter is...was Prongs, and his form was that of a magnificent stag. Ring a bell, now?”

Simeon gaped. “James Potter was also an illegal Animagus! So the stag that attacked Alastor...”

“Bingo,” Snape muttered under his breath.

“Okay, but what about the fourth Marauder, then? Potter only had three Patronuses, not four.”

It was Albus who spoke next with a somber voice. “I surely hope he has only those three. If this is the case, then the events of his past must be comparable to ours. You see, Simeon, the fourth Marauder was discovered to be a spy for Voldemort but only after the dreadful occurrence at Godric’s Hollow. Peter Pettigrew, alias Wormtail; a rat Animagus who is worth every ounce of the animal he is representing.”

“ PETTIGREW!” Simeon bellowed angrily, “Pettigrew was a Marauder! Merlin, it’s all coming together now.” The man sat down and tried to sort his thoughts.

Severus frowned. “Albus, do you think that Pettigrew also framed the Potters in the boy’s world like he did here?”

The Headmaster nodded glumly. “I pretty much think so. The only interrogation spot is why or how Harry was able to stay alive during that fateful night. I have my idea but I will have to interrogate him to be sure.”

“Then interrogate him and end this child’s play, for Merlin’s sake! You are a wizard, are you not? Just blast the damn portrait guarding the entrance open and get on with it!” the Potions Master snapped impatiently.

Albus shook his head. “As much as I would like to, I can’t. I’ve already tried all the unlocking spells I knew, plus a couple of...more dangerous ones; nothing works. There’s a new ward protecting the

entrance so either Sirius and Remus combined their best magic to put it there or Harry did something to it by himself. It seems that only the password can allow access to those quarters.”

Albus sighed frustratingly and plopped a Lemon Drop in his mouth, not even bothering, this time, to offer some to his guests. “I’ve made my mind. The first person who will come in contact with our young Mister Potter will bring him to my office immediately; use force if necessary. I need the answers. If Sirius or Remus are with him and try to interfere, stun them. Harry has been evading my questions for too long and if there is one thing I hate it is to be left in the dark. The Dark Lord is getting bolder and bolder every day. If Harry is who I think he is things will be much easier for us. Meeting adjourned.”

Albus leaned back in his chair as the Order members started to file out. “Oh, one last thing: do not tell any of this to either Rosmerta or Xiomara. I have a hunch that those two are not quite completely with us, not in a bad way, of course, but I don’t need them to run to Harry. I think they are the ones who tipped Sirius, Remus and Harry that we were fighting in Hogsmeade.”

The group nodded and finally walked out.

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“I hate Dementors.”

Sirius and Remus looked up and stopped their conversation when Harry woke up with that sentence flowing from the tip of his lips.

Both men hurried up to his bed and Harry had a mouthful of chocolate in a second, courtesy of Remus. The boy scowled but swallowed the sweet morsel nonetheless, glad for the regenerating effect it provided.

“I hate being weak in front of them. I hate having to hear my parents, especially my mother, beg to Voldemort for me to be sparred.”

Sirius immediately hugged him but before Harry could embrace him back the man had put his hands on his shoulders and pushed him so they were face to face. The Animagus' eyes held a tint of fierceness and sincerity that shook Harry into really listening to what his Godfather had to say.

“Listen Harry! You. Are. Not. Weak! You drove hundreds of Dementors away by yourself with an amount of power that would drive any wizard jealous! No one else would have been able to do that with the memories that haunts you! And normally you create the Patronus before being in their presence, not when you're in the middle of the fight! It was normal in those circumstances to be affected badly by their presence. But you fought back nonetheless and you won! Dumbledore must be so irritated right now!”

Harry couldn't help but smile at Sirius. Remus put a hand on Harry's shoulder when the Animagus stepped back. “I'm proud of you, Harry. Those Patronuses were really something special.”

Harry thought about it. “It's the first time I've been able to produce a Patronus other than Prongs. I guess that now that my magical powers have increased it's possible for me to produce Padfoot and Moony. It's no secret why it was those two who appeared next; Sirius and you were and are the most important people in my life. You're my family; the family I've never had.”

The Animagus and Werewolf were touched by those words.

Hedwig flew in by the open window and hooted to make herself known. Harry laughed and raised his arm so she could land on it. “Hello girl!” Harry cooed softly. “I'm happy to see you.” He petted the snowy white owl and something clicked in Remus' head.

“Hey Harry? Didn't you receive a letter earlier? Did you open it?”

Harry hit his forehead with his hand and groaned. “I completely forgot about it!”

Hedwig hooted in annoyance at being bothered and flew away on his desk. Harry took the letter out of his robe pocket and grimaced; it was all crumpled from the earlier activities but he could discern the crest of the Centaurs.

“Who is it from?” Sirius asked curiously; he had never seen such a nice but intricate writing before.

The Boy-Who-Lived opened it and started to read. “That’s something I had yet to talk to you about. I made an alliance with the Centaurs with Bane’s and Firenze’s collaboration. The news is good.”

Harry set the letter aside and sighed in relief, missing the wide and astounded gazes the Marauders sent him. “You created an alliance with the Centaurs! Even Dumbledore was unable to do that!” Sirius exclaimed in amazement and eagerness.

“So what is the good news?” Remus asked once he regained his usual coolness.

“I wanted to invite the Acromantulas to join us in this war and Bane was successful into persuading Aragog and Mosag, his mate. The Unicorns will stay away but the Thestrals are on Hogwarts’ side.” Harry chuckled. “That must be because of good ol’ Hagrid. Bless him for loving dangerous animals. But I wonder were Fluffy is...And Norbert...They would be of great help. Too bad that Grawp isn’t here. I will have to speak to Hagrid about him.”

It was fortunate for Sirius and Remus to have seen Harry’s memories or else they would have been completely lost about what or whom the boy was muttering about.

“Hey Harry? Don’t you have someone to introduce to Remus?” Sirius asked mischievously while Harry was producing a piece of parchment. Remus eyed Sirius distrustfully. “What are you on about, Padfoot?”

Harry glanced at his Godfather, who winked back and nodded in the direction of his covered left arm. Understanding dawned on him and he shrugged, taking the gauntlets off carefully.

The look on Remus' face when he saw the moving tattoo made Sirius snigger and then explode in laughter when the snake actually left Harry's arm and started to slither on the boy.

"Masster What iss it? Thiss man smellss funny, not human. Do you want me to bite him?"

"No Nagini. You cannot bite Remusss. He iss a Werewolf but he will never endanger my life."

Remus was scared shitless when the snake looked at him menacingly but surprise overrode the feeling when Harry spoke to it in Parseltongue. Apparently, whatever the boy had said was making the snake look away in sudden disinterest.

"Okay, I am officially unable to be impressed by anything you will tell or show me anymore," the Werewolf deadpanned, not even asking how in Circe's name Harry had become the master of Voldemort's favorite pet.

"You should've seen your face, Moony! It was hilarious!" Sirius chuckled, earning himself a playful swipe on the head from Remus.

Harry had long ago tuned their banter out and was replying to Bane, who was asking for another meeting with him to talk about further war plans. But the problem was that the Forbidden Forest was beginning to become a very dangerous place to live in because of Death Eater activity and they, as in the Centaurs, wanted to meet on Hogwarts' grounds, as impossible as it sounded.

'Bane and the rest of the Council must be desperate if they want to leave the forest. They must want to protect their young.' Harry didn't blame them and wrote that they could come at any time; he would be the representative of the human race anyway since it was him who asked for their help. Dumbledore would not have any say in this.

“There, finished. Hedwig? Can you bring this to Bane or Firenze please?” The owl glided to him, took the letter in her beak and flew away in haste.

“I’ll have to see Salazar soon; it’s been a while,” Harry muttered while he raked a hand through his hair.

Sirius and Remus looked at him curiously. “Salazar? Who the hell would have Slytherin’s name and be your friend?” the Animagus asked with a guarded air.

“Salazar is the Basilisk from the Chamber of Secrets. Back home I killed it with Gryffindor’s sword but here I was able to turn him on my side. I don’t think he really liked Tom in the first place.”

Remus sat down. “Not impressed, not impressed...” he chanted under his breath, trying not to think about Harry going in that dreaded Chamber and facing a Basilisk all by himself.

Sirius eyed his friend weirdly and decided not to comment.

“If you really need to go there I advise you to wait.”

The three men jumped on their feet and had their wand out before anyone could say Quidditch.

“Nigellus? What the heck are you doing in my quarters?” Harry asked once his level of adrenaline was back to normal.

The ex-Headmaster sniggered at the wary expression Black and Lupin sent him but, other than that, the portrait ignored their presence. “If you must know, Dumbledore just had an Order meeting in his office.”

Sirius looked outraged at not being called for this meeting. “What is that old man playing at! Does he not see that Harry is directly involved in all of this? He has no right to keep us away from the worthy information!” the Animagus cried out in anger.

Remus growled but bit his lips and kept his thoughts to himself.

Phineas disregarded their indignation and became concerned about the health of the portrait he was presently residing in; Harry was gazing at him so calmly it almost made the painting shudder.

“You...you can’t get out now. There’s an auror guarding your door and waiting for you to show up. Dumbledore asked his Order members to capture you, for lack of better word, and bring you to his office. Even to stun Black and Lupin if they tried to protect you.” Phineas cried out and was barely able to jump to a nearby portrait in the room before the painting he was in was destroyed in a backlash of magic.

Sirius and Remus shielded themselves and stayed away as Harry vented his fury on the furniture.

“Why. Is he. Being so difficult! EXURO!”

A couch lasted barely three seconds before it was engulfed in inferno hot flames and reduced to ashes.

“He’s not even giving me a chance! Why does he always want to have supreme control over everyone and everything! COORIOR PROCELLA!”

Nigellus and the Marauders were long gone from the living room and had decided to take cover in the kitchen. A wise move from their part because it actually started to rain in the living room, a downpour with thunder and lightning included.

Harry was spared, though, because at the moment his magical aura was strong enough to shield him from the rain as he expelled his frustration.

It ended as quickly as it had started and when they came back in the living room Harry was sitting on the soaking rug with a murderous expression etched on his normally collected face.

“Did you finish throwing your temper tantrum now?” Phineas asked cautiously and Harry nodded stiffly. The ex-Headmaster sighed. “I’m going back in Dumbledore’s office now. If something new comes up I’ll make sure to warn you.”

Sirius chuckled nervously. “I’ll make sure I never get on your bad side Emeralds.”

Harry got up and changed clothes, grumbling all the way to his bedroom. When he finally came out he appeared to have reigned in his rage and he restored the living room as it was with a wave of his hand, plopping himself down on the loveseat.

Remus approached him carefully but such wariness wasn’t needed when it came to them. Harry bade them to sit down and do as if nothing had happened. “You don’t have to be scared of me, you guys. You know you weren’t the targets of my anger.”

Both men nodded silently and since there wasn’t anything else to do than stay in Harry’s quarters they just searched for good Defense books to read and tried not to look at the time too often.

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Harry woke up hours later to the muffled sound of someone having a dispute with another person. From the sound of it, it was Rosmerta and Xiomara who were trying to get near his door but the Auror guarding it refused to let them pass.

He set his Defense book aside and yawned soundlessly, rubbing his stomach when it spoke its hunger up.

Sirius and Remus had also fallen asleep with some books in their laps and he tried not to awake them. Remus was really tired because the full moon was tomorrow, so they would have to get out one day or another.

For now he decided to ignore the bickering women in the corridor and walked in the kitchen, grimacing when he saw that there wasn't anything good to eat in the magical refrigerator.

"Thank Merlin for Hogwarts and her hidden passageways," Harry whispered and opened a closet in his bedroom. He set the clothes aside and, after writing a small note to his Godfather and Remus, he disappeared in a tunnel that led to the kitchens.

"Nagini? Can you seek Ssalazar and tell him that he can go hunt in the forest? He must be hungry. You can accompany him if you are hungry."

The Cobra slithered on his arm and down his leg, taking another junction on the right. "Alright Master, but I will come back as soon as the message is delivered. I already ate this week and my senses are tingling. I do not feel like leaving you alone."

Harry decided not to ponder on this and bade his second familiar good luck before he resumed his trek towards the kitchens.

He was immediately "attacked" by a bunch of House-Elves as soon as he showed up.

"Oh! A small master! We are happy to see you! Not many people know the way to the kitchens! Are you wanting something sir?"

Harry smiled softly, knowing that the House-Elves were dutiful and loyal creatures to have around...Except Kreacher, but that –thing– was another matter altogether. They reminded him of Dobby and his smile dampened; he truly missed the courageous, if not ambiguous House-Elf who had given his life so readily to protect Harry.

"Hi! Um, I'm really hungry. Would it be possible to have something to eat? Anything will be fine, and some Pumpkin juice would be nice."

Their already big eyes widened and they nodded frantically, disappearing with a loud POP! and reappearing not seconds later with handfuls of goodies and drinks. They set everything on the table

and Harry sat down and started to munch a delicious shepherd's pie. "That's really good, as usual! Thank you very much!"

The House-Elves opened their mouth and started to jump up and down in excitement. "A thank you from a small master! Nobody ever thank us House-Elves! Sir is too good!"

Harry chuckled at their familiar antics. "You know, sir makes me sound so old. You can just call me Harry."

The small but powerful creatures gaped in awe at being spoken to with so much respect and they crowded around him.

"Master Harry sir is too good! Too good!"

"Nobody ever tell I to call master by their name!"

"Master Headmaster sir never come here, oh no, never! And he give us too much work! Too much since guests arrived!"

'Wow, they must really be tired if they're complaining without banging their heads,' Harry thought in a daze, but listened to their complaints without interrupting.

Suddenly they all stopped talking and backed away in fear, quivering and muttering apologies as they vanished.

"Well, well, what do we have here?" a mocking voice sneered right behind him.

Harry mentally hit himself for being careless but he stayed calm and turned around, giving a glacial look at Severus Snape. "I never thought I'd be finding you here, Potter. Just like your father, breaking rules as always. Such disrespect. What? Do you really think you're better than everyone?"

"Why are you being like that? So childish? The Severus Snape I knew actually grew civil after a while but you seem to hold a grudge against me even when you don't even know me in the first place. I

know my father wasn't as perfect as everyone portrayed him to be but as a teacher it is no reason to speak to me like that," Harry replied smoothly.

Snape's eyes twitched but showed no other sign of being taken aback. He had clearly expected the boy to lash out at him for insulting James Potter but Harry had merely tensed his muscles. Snape didn't know what to reply so he just pursed his lips tightly and glared at the kid in front of him. "Well, now that I've got you, you won't be running away. The Headmaster is-"

"-expecting me in his office? Yes, I know all about that. After all, you talked about me during an entire meeting when I should have been invited. Do you see that Phoenix tattoo on my cheek, professor Snape? I think it's big enough but I have yet to be invited in a private Order of the Phoenix meeting," Harry glowered and stepped menacingly towards the Potions Master, who tried as hard to look intimidating.

The older man took Harry by the arm roughly and pushed him out of the kitchens; Harry almost stumbled in the corridor but regained his footing, glaring back and nearly hissing at Snape. His wand was out in an instant and he ignored the cries of students and guests who were around to concentrate on the Potions Master, who had also drawn his wand.

"Don't you think about it, Potter! I have the permission to stun you if necessary!" Snape growled.

Harry sent him a fierce look. "You wouldn't have the time to do it, Snape! The only thing keeping me from cursing you for your impoliteness is the people around who could get hurt."

Snape faltered and motioned for Harry to walk ahead of him in the direction of the Headmaster's office. Harry didn't feel like talking with the old man at the moment but if not now, when?

Still, the way Dumbledore was sending his teachers after him was cowardly, in Harry's opinion.

“Harry? What’s going on?” Ron and Hermione, flanked with the usual Gryffindor gang, watched warily as Snape sent them a glare but held the green eyed boy at wand point.

“Nothing you have to concern yourselves with, children. Go back to whatever you were doing,” Snape ordered, but Hermione shook her head and stepped in front of Harry to stop them. “What has he done, professor? He’s not the enemy! Why are you holding him at wand point like that?”

“Miss Granger, I suggest you to listen to the pleading of your” sneer “boyfriend and go back to him before I petrify you. This isn’t any of your business.”

True, Ron was pleading for her to step aside but she put her feet firmly on the floor and crossed her arms.

Harry, for an instant, recognized the old Hermione in her.

“No, I will not move.”

Snape shrugged, just a small movement but Harry saw it at the corner of his widening eyes. The wand slowly changed direction and pointed towards the now gasping Hermione. ‘He’s not really going to-’ Harry started with incredulity and ire but couldn’t finish his thoughts because Snape opened his mouth, to the horror of the people around.

“Petrificus Totalus!”

“ NO!” In an instant, Harry was in front of Hermione. “PRAEMUNITIO!”

The stunner bounced off the protection shield. Harry was fuming. He was livid. “How dare you attack a student! Even a simple Petrificus Totalus is an offense!” Harry shouted, his eyes becoming a darker shade of green.

Snape was surprised that the boy had such rapid reflexes. "I am merely following Dumbledore's orders to bring you to his office with or without your cooperation. I will not let anyone stop me, and certainly not a mindless student!"

Snape shut up and paled as soon as he noticed that it hadn't been the right thing to say when he felt an aggressive magical aura start to push against him and he blacked out from the assault.

The students gasped as Snape fell unconscious on the floor; Harry hadn't even lifted a finger, so what had happened? "Harry? What happened?" Hermione whispered once she stopped shaking. A stunner wasn't dangerous but she hadn't been capable to move against a teacher.

Harry didn't reply. He stalked towards the Headmaster's office with the firm intention of giving him a piece of his mind. 'Why is he being an ass in this world!'

Hermione wanted to follow Harry but a restricting hand on her shoulder made her come back to reality. "Hermione, I think you better leave him alone." It was Rosmerta, and Hooch wasn't far behind.

The flying instructor grumbled. "How the heck was he able to get out of his guarded quarters without anyone seeing him? We've tried to get in for hours but Shackbolt didn't want to let us in!"

Ron quickly took his girlfriend by the arm and hugged her. "Don't you ever do that again! You nearly gave me a heart attack!" the redhead whined.

Seamus laughed. "But it was bloody cool! I didn't know you had it in you Hermione! Imagine that, a Ravenclaw going against a teacher's orders! You should have been put into Gryffindor!"

Hermione looked appalled but one could see she was joking. "Me? In Gryffindor? Never!"

They all chuckled.

Rosmerta stepped aside and Xiomara followed her silently. They kneeled in front of the Potions Master and checked him over. "He's just unconscious. I think Harry could have hurt him a lot more if he had really wanted to. I don't know why I have this feeling. Ennervate!"

Eyebrows rose when the teacher stayed silent and unmoving.

"Well, I think it would be better to bring him to Madam Pomfrey," Rosmerta finally said and cast a Mobilicorpus on Snape. "You kids better not stay here."

Ron snickered. "Too bad we can't just leave Snape on the floor. It would give Filch a heart attack!"

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The boy fidgeted.

The woman whimpered.

The man's face was completely red; he was about to burst, and burst he did once the silence became too offensive.

"WELL, WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH US! ARE WE PRISONERS! WE ESCAPED FROM THAT FREAK ONLY TO BE CAPTURED BY YOU!"

Dumbledore kept his face neutral and calm and he plopped a Lemon Drop in his mouth. "Please calm down and sit back in the chair. You were brought here for your own security plus I have some questions I want to ask you. Would you like a Lemon Drop?" the old man asked jovially, making the man standing in front of him go red in the face again.

"YOU WANT TO POISON ME WITH YOUR FREAKISH FOOD? THERE'S NO WAY I'LL TAKE ANYTHING YOU OFFER ME!"

The woman whimpered again while her son gulped nervously. "Dad, maybe you shouldn't anger the frea- I mean man. What if he

becomes angry like the one who attacked us and..." the boy didn't finish his phrase; he was too scared of giving the old freak ideas.

Dumbledore gave the boy some attention. "Ah, right in the subject! About this attack...You are the only family that has survived."

The woman gasped in horror and let out strident whines but nobody paid attention to her for the moment. The muggle man paled at the memory but huffed and sat down, crossing his arms in the process. "What about it? It's your freakish kind that attacked us! We were only living our lives normally! We didn't do anything!"

"I know, I know. Please don't try to go around the subject. I need to know how you survived. What happened in the house when-"

"When the freak was about to kill us?" the man deadpanned. "I pointed a riffle at him, he did something freakish and swat it aside. Then he did something else that's even more freakish and we had enough time to escape, only to be caught by other weird clothed men and brought here AGAINST OUR WILL! When I find a lawyer I'll sue you so bad..." the muggle man sneered but compared to Snape's sneer it was nothing.

Albus disregarded the foul language and the empty threat by plopping another Lemon Drop in his mouth and happily sucking the calming potion hidden inside out of it. "To quote you: what kind of freaky things did he do before you were able to escape?"

The man refused to look at the Headmaster; it was the boy who blurted it all out when he saw how imposing the old person in front of him was. "He said something and then stopped himself!"

The father of the boy growled. The woman was still eerily silent.

"What did he say? What happened, my boy?" Albus pressed.

The seventeen years old raked his brain for the memory. "It was, uh...A-Av..."

“Avada Kedavra?” Dumbledore interrupted stiffly.

The boy nodded and the father grunted.

“That spell is the most dangerous and forbidden one to use; it’s the Killing Curse. But how can you still be alive?”

The boy whined. “But I don’t think he said it completely because he stopped and shouted no at the last second and he gripped his head as if it hurt. The freakish thing is: his voice changed at that very moment before going back to normal. It was the voice of someone way younger than that monster, a boy’s voice.”

“...I see... Voldemort killed so many people. Just trying to use the Killing Curse can land a wizard to the-”

“-Prison of Azkaban and be given the Dementor’s kiss.”

Three sets of very wide eyes whirled around to look at the woman who had whispered softly.

“WHAT! What is a Dementor? How do you know of those abnormal things?” the husband asked dangerously.

The woman fidgeted under her family’s, but especially under the old man’s piercing stare. Her facial expression turned bitter and she pursed her lips together. “If you must know, I heard my sister talk about it one summer day between two school years, but by that time I had already cut any friendly ties I had with her and her freakish ways. Mother and Father might have been proud of her...accomplishments, but I didn’t-”

“DUMBLEDORE!”

The door of Dumbledore’s office quivered as it was assaulted with a raging burst of magic. The boy had only enough time to squeak “that’s the voice!” before the door immediately started to melt.

The family ran aside and tried as much as they could to blend in the walls. When the woman saw who had just entered the office, she screamed while pointing a digit at him.

The dark haired boy either ignored her or simply didn't hear her; he was too concentrated on the Headmaster who was currently standing as stiff as a board and looking at Harry warningly. He hadn't taken his wand out yet but he was fingering it in his pocket.

"Hello Harry. I was in the middle of something before you so amazingly interrupted. Do you want to say hello to the only surviving family of the Privet Drive massacre? After all, they are still alive today because of you, am I right?" Dumbledore said as neutrally as he could but Harry could still hear accusing undertones.

It was only then that he saw movements in the corner of the office and he gazed emptily at those he had saved. "So, you brought them here after all. I still don't know why I saved them, isn't it ironic?" Harry mocked, and they could all hear the volatility in his voice.

Dumbledore sat down but still held his guard. "What I want to know is how in the Nine Depths of Hells you were able to get out of this castle undetected, go all the way to Little Wing and survive in the presence of such an enormous quantity of Death Eaters before saving this one family. They told me the Dark Lord's voice changed for a brief moment and the boy identified your voice. What do you have to say about that?"

Harry sneered menacingly. "I never left the castle! Now, I want to know why YOU held up a private Order meeting in your office, didn't even think of asking Remus, Sirius and I to come when we are the ones who helped get rid of the Dementors in Hogsmeade AND how did you have the GUTS to ask your people to DETAIN me against my will! IF YOU THINK YOU'LL HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS YOU WANT ON A SILVER PLATTER, ALBUS DUMBLEDORE, YOU ARE SADLY MISTAKEN!"

A couple of trinkets in the office cracked and exploded, making the Dursleys cry out. Apparently, Harry had forgotten about them being in the room.

The Headmaster's eyes became deadly serious and interested; tensing was the only outward appearance he showed at the offense of being talked to that way. "How do you know about the Order meeting?"

Harry grinned wickedly. "I am an Order member. I have my ways. I have my allies. I have my spies. And no, you won't know anything until you stop being an ass. The Dumbledore in my world was meddling but in no way as daring as you. I agree, I didn't let anyone know of my past but Sirius and Remus, and that's pretty recent, but you didn't have to try to force it out of me and push me away from the battles for it. You'll never be able to get rid of Voldemort if you all act like this. Believe me, I know," Harry added spitefully.

Dumbledore's countenance deflated slightly. "I'm almost afraid to ask...The Prophecy?"

Harry crossed his arms and, for an instant, Albus thought he saw a flash of pain traverse the unusual green eyes before it was replaced by nothingness.

"You tried to sick the Prophecy on Neville Longbottom, didn't you? But it didn't work. Tom didn't even try to go after Neville. True, it could have been him, but then again he would have had" Harry lifted a black forelock, revealing a lightning bolt shaped scar "that on his forehead. In my world I was called the Boy-Who-Lived. After all, I was the only one in all wizardry history to survive the Killing Curse. It was my mother's love and some of my own magic, though neither I nor Dumbledore knew about that second fact, which made the Curse rebound off of me and killing the mortal body of Tom Riddle. I was one year old at the time. But he came back in my first year at Hogwarts."

Dumbledore looked guilty and curious at the same time. "What happened?"

Harry gave Albus the evil eye, his magic flaring slightly around him. Fawkes thrilled and flew around him, trying to make him regain his

senses. Harry blinked at the Phoenix and took a big breath. "Wouldn't you like to know?" he asked tauntingly.

Albus sighed restlessly. "Listen Harry, we need all the information you can give us. We need you to help in this war. If you are the one from the Prophecy, then why did Harry die here?"

"Oh, so NOW you want my help? Because No one can live while the other survives? Read the old newspapers, Dumbledore. I'm not even originally from this world but I found this answer long ago. I won't give my trust back so easily to those who first threw it in the trash can, - Headmaster-," Harry stressed the word.

"Do your things if you want to but you'll have to think and work hard if you want me to divulge my secrets." Harry was about to turn around when he stopped momentarily. "Oh, and if you even think of laying a hand on Rosmerta, Hooch, Sirius or Remus...You'll regret it dearly. Snape already paid the price for messing with me. Don't treat me like a kid, it could prove to be a fatal mistake...one which cost Tom Riddle's life in my world."

Then he turned around and stalked out of the office, leaving a trembling family behind –his gaze had been frigid cold and unforgiving- and a floored Headmaster.

Said Headmaster ignored his Lemon Drops and sighed heavily, leaning his head on his desk.

Fawkes ignored his distress.

"I royally fucked up."

Harry would have loved to hear THAT coming from Albus Dumbledore's mouth.

Dudley Dursley was still gripping his mother's blouse tightly. "I didn't understand half of what was said but one thing I know: I won't be messing with that guy anytime soon."

Petunia was still shaking, not from the threat of the boy but from his overall appearance.

Vernon was being Vernon; "Who the Hell was that boy, Petunia?" he spat angrily.

His wife whimpered and stuttered. "I-I thought it was...Oh Lord!" The skinny woman shook in fright. "I thought it was James Potter!"

Albus Dumbledore got up silently; his body was lax and his eyes showed how really tired he was and how guilty he felt. "I will show you to your quarters. Until the threat is over you won't be able to leave the castle without being targeted again by Voldemort. He probably knows that you escaped and he never lets anyone escape. He'll try to track you down." The Headmaster's voice was eerily empty.

Vernon was about to open his mouth and shout his ire at being held here with all the freaks when the old man spoke up again, but this time mainly to the pale woman.

"And that was not James Potter, Mrs. Dursley. It was Harry James Potter, your nephew who died seventeen years ago...but this one is from a different dimension, to be more precise."

The woman's breath caught in her throat and she wobbled on her feet before she fainted.

Vernon caught her before she hit the ground and snarled at Dumbledore. "WE are not associated with that freak! So stop talking and just lead us where we are supposed to go, old man, before I loose my temper!"

Albus nodded silently and didn't even attempt to cast the levitating charm on the man's wife.

Vernon's anger transformed into terror when he followed the Headmaster in the mind boggling corridors of the castle; countless students and adults were running around, giving orders, obeying, STARING at his family and him curiously or apprehensively. 'Freaks the lot of them,' the beefy man thought sourly.

“Dumbledore! Snape’s in the Infirmary! Where’s Potter?”

Dudley whimpered and hid behind his father when another wizard stepped towards the bearded man. He was freaky in every sense of the word: he was covered in scars and limping, but the most disgusting thing was the eye in his face that moved every second and even disappeared as if it was also looking behind. Dudley shuddered when the eye fell on him and hid his fat body even more behind his father.

Alastor grunted in mild disgust when he saw the muggle family but chose to ignore them in favor of getting his answer from Dumbledore.

Albus sighed. “I already saw him, Alastor. We should give him a wide berth for a while. I think we underestimated him. Apologies are in order but we should wait; he won’t accept them so easily. Tell everyone who has been looking for him to stop searching and leave him and both Marauders alone. They will also be included in –every-Order meeting, if Harry even wants to be in them anymore. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have a family to accommodate.”

Alastor’s eyes narrowed. “Why the sudden change, Albus?”

But Dumbledore didn’t answer and the Auror sighed frustratingly.

However, he did hear the fat boy mutter something which made Moody hold his breath in disbelief and run to the Headmaster’s office to see the wreckage.

“Why the sudden change he asks?” snort “He wasn’t there when the boy melted the door as if it was nothing!”

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“CRUCIO!”

In Little Hangleton, Riddle Mansion to be more precise, a cloaked and masked man fell on the floor and writhed in agony, screaming continuously until his master got tired of holding the spell.

“What. Happened.”

Sharp, dangerous and to the point.

Tom Marvolo Riddle was NOT in a good mood.

Draco Malfoy winced as his father received punishment for the botched attack planned on Hogsmeade with the Dementors' help.

The blonde aristocrat stayed on the ground, kneeling, trying to shake off the aftershock of the Cruciatus. “We- we do not know, my Lord!”

“CRUCIO!”

Lucius fell again and screamed his throat raw. As soon as it came, the curse was gone.

“Lucius, you are one of my most trusted and powerful followers. Why must you torment me so? Why do you let yourself be struck like this when all you would need to stay unscathed would be an answer to my question?”

Lucius stayed silent, not knowing how to respond. He had been certain the attack would kill Hogsmeade's inhabitants but no! The Dementors just had to come back here, screeching, and in fewer number! It wasn't a large gap in his Lord's forces, but what in Grindewald's name had happened to the others!

The blonde man winced when he heard his master rake his nails against the armrests of the throne he was sitting on. “I am so disappointed,” Voldemort sighed before he put Lucius under the curse again, plus those who had helped the blonde in making the attack plans.

Several cries of agony later Riddle lifted the spell, seemingly disinterested. "Has anyone heard anything about James Evans?"

Tom changed the subject rapidly and eyed each of his present followers piercingly. 'I want to know...Who is he?...How did he get into my mind?...I tire of this little game. He seems to have an advantage and is wining. I don't like that.'

No one answered.

"I see."

'Pathetic, useless fools.' He was about to raise his wand against the whole lot of them as a punishment when a voice timidly interrupted him.

"I...I may know...Who he really is..."

The Death Eaters all wanted to stare at Peter Pettigrew but no one dared to lift their head; the blood traitor may have saved their hides right now.

"Wormtail. Come here, my favorite little traitor."

The wild eyed man quickly made his way to his master and fell in a heap on the floor, kissing his Lord's robes. "Master...Master...They were winning in Hogsmeade. They were winning, your Dementors! The old man and his pitiful Order members were backing away right when they arrived!" Wormtail whined and seemed more agitated than the usual.

Lucius was pissed. 'He knows what happened in Hogsmeade! Why didn't he say anything sooner, the little piece of shit! I got cursed good because of his late response! Once I get my hands on him...'

Peter's actions, or rather his reactions, stirred up Tom's interest. "What happened, Wormtail? You look oddly nervous," Riddle asked suspiciously.

Pettigrew almost shrunk under his Master's heavy gaze but, for once, it wasn't the red eyes that were making him quiver the way he was, but rather all the facts and evidences he had collected.

"It was...It was them, Master. Black and Lupin." Both names were spat out but fear was written all over the escapee's face. "They came after a while to help the retreating group. I saw them. I was spying on them in my Animagus form. Their Patronus helped but they weren't strong enough to repel such a number of Dementors."

"So? Where are you getting at!" Voldemort was losing patience.

Wormtail whimpered and looked around agitatedly. "That's when he arrived. The Griffin Animagus who calls himself James Evans."

Voldemort sat straighter in his chair.

"The old man didn't look happy to see him, though. Something must have happened. But Black and Lupin seemed to know that the boy would do a difference, as impossible as it sounds. When he transformed back he appeared to be in great pain, certainly the effect of the nearness of the Dementors, and then he brandished his wand and..."

"And?"

"...He has three Patronuses. The appearance of the Patronuses..." Pettigrew shivered.

Lucius sneered under his mask. 'Just say it, you spineless imbecile! You ran away in fear, that's for sure...But what could have possibly scare him like that?...'

"A stag, a grim-like dog and a Werewolf." Peter gulped, an image of the Marauders in school looking down at him with a sneer passing in his mind. "James Potter, Sirius Black and Remus Lupin. I heard someone call the boy's name out...Harry...I know it's impossible..."

At this point, Voldemort's red eyes glinted forebodingly and he punched an armrest. "OUT! EVERYONE OUT!"

The Death Eaters all scampered away and Peter whimpered before following suite; he was almost on the verge of crying. For a crazy man coming out of Azkaban, he was sure aware of whom the boy really was, being the first to figure it out, of all people. For Pettigrew, it appeared more to be some sort of revenge of James Potter coming from the grave and it was scaring the shit out of his unstable mind.

.....

Tom Riddle inhaled and exhaled loudly but it didn't calm him in the least. He didn't know how this was possible but all evidence pointed towards it: James Evans was Harry Potter. He had even used his dead parents' names under everyone's bloody noses, for Circe's sake!

Harry –bloody- Potter, the boy he was a hundred percent certain he had killed with his own bare hands. He could still feel the victorious sensation as he held the lifeless little body of the one year old sixteen years ago.

‘What kind of magic is this! No one can be brought back to life!’ He breathed more loudly each passing second until he just snapped.

“RHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

Pointing his wand at his entourage, the furious Dark Lord proceeded to destroy everything his eyes landed on, and in the process doubling his mental barriers.

Unbeknownst to him, these barriers were connected to someone else...Someone who could feel all of his emotions perfectly.

The confusion.

The hatred.

The loathing.

The need to kill.

To destroy.

To annihilate.

...To see the blood spill...

.....

That's how Amos Diggory, who was just innocently passing by in the corridor, found himself with an armful of cataleptic Harry Potter after the boy suddenly screamed in pure agony, started shaking as if there was an earthquake, clutched at his forehead –trying to scratch it away madly with his fingernails-, and then fell unconscious with one last dying scream, bloody pouring from the scar on his forehead and trickling out of the corner of his mouth.

He never saw Sirius and a very tired looking Remus shout his name in horror and pushing Diggory out of the way to hold him and call out his name in desperation.

Never saw Diggory back away swiftly and almost stumble in fear.

Never saw the absolute terror written on the children's and teachers' faces who had just turned the corner.

No. Harry James Potter was simply stuck in absolute darkness.

A good twenty three pages! HA! The plot is coming along nicely. Pettigrew is more observant than he looks (but still a creep and a cowardly, spineless moron.) Don't think that fainting right now is making Harry look weak. He said so himself in one of the chapters that whenever Tom would find out his true identity he was sure to feel it. Feel it he did. Even he could not withstand Voldemort's current fury.

Don't worry. Harry will kick ass. (He kinda did already with Dumbledore. I liked that part. It was self-satisfying.) Congrats to all who guessed who the surviving muggle family was. (It wasn't that hard; Just hearing the word "freak" makes the name "Dursley" pop up in my head.)

... And I have no idea of what I'll be writing next...(sweatdrop)
Probably a little Remus/Wolfsbane POV added somewhere.

Anyway! I hope you enjoyed! REVIEW!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos

Chapter 21: Ssssnake

Darkness.

Suffocating.

Pain.

Solitude.

Fear.

Anger.

Pure...

RAGE.

Harry woke up, gasping and drenched in sweat, sitting in the bed. He immediately regretted his actions when he found out how much his body protested against any small movements he made and he leaned back onto the bed reluctantly.

‘What a killer headache!’ he mentally groaned and put a hand on his forehead, only to find it heavily bandaged. ‘I’m in the Hospital Wing,’ he deduced since his vision was hazy, and the remaining taste of healing potions left in his mouth didn’t help his already sour mood.

He blinked a couple of times to get his vision back, thanking the Alastor from his world for bringing him muggle contacts and charming them so he could always wear them. “Sirius? Remus?” he slurred questioningly when both men came into his line of view.

The Marauders quickly forgot their uncertainty and hugged him tightly. “You’re all right! Merlin Harry, you scared us half to death yesterday!” Sirius breathed out.

Harry looked around him and noticed that the Infirmary was rather crowded. Madam Pomfrey was shaking her head at Sirius' and Remus' demeanor and was probably itching to do a complete check-up on Harry, Dumbledore looked contemplative but stayed silent and Amos Diggory looked as traumatized as yesterday when Harry fell into his arms; most of the Order was here, plus Rosmerta and Hooch, who were still glaring at Kingsley Shacklebolt and Moody.

McGonagall was as tight lipped as always but kept sending Harry worried glances while Snape, awake at last, was standing in a corner and looking rather subdued and thoughtful, sending the green eyed boy some odd looks.

Harry stiffened in the Marauders' arms. "What are they doing here?" He nodded his head in the direction of the members of the Order.

Remus sighed and sat back in his chair and Harry saw how tired the Werewolf really was. He quickly forgot his animosity towards the Order of the Phoenix's members and gave Sirius and Remus all his attention. "I'm sorry Remus. You must be so tired and I'm only making you worry more. Tonight's the full moon, right?" the boy asked, suddenly afraid that they would say it had already passed.

Remus put a hand on Harry's. "Yeah, it is. But don't blame yourself Harry; I'm always tired on the day of the full moon. Actually, I think the Wolfsbane potion helped already. Normally I would've been beside you in a hospital bed."

Harry smiled slightly and exhaled. "That's good to hear. I didn't want to miss it."

Molly Weasley looked downright alarmed. "You don't have the intention on going in the Forbidden Forest with Black and Lupin, do you! Or the Shrieking Shack? It's way too dangerous!"

Harry didn't look at her. "I know the danger, that's why we'll stay in Hogwarts tonight."

Remus' eyes widened while cries of objection echoed in the Infirmary. Harry shut them up with a fierce glare.

Dumbledore stepped in front of his complaining teachers and they backed away. "First, it's not that I mind, you said that the potion Remus is taking would make him keep his mind during the transformation, but how do you intend on hiding a Werewolf in a school full of wandering children and adults? There is a curfew but it's still very dangerous to hide such an animal in any classroom."

Harry rolled his eyes. Remus was still very worried, as was Sirius. "Honestly, Dumbledore, do you really think I'd let Moony, even with all of his mental faculties intact, roam in the castle or simply be locked away in a small classroom? I know of a place where we'll be perfectly safe and we'll have all the place we'll need."

Albus still didn't get it so Harry sighed exasperatingly.

"The Room of Requirements, Dumbledore."

The old man's eyes widened in remembrance and he nodded while the teachers gave him curious gazes; none dared to voice their question, though. "I had forgotten about this place. Since you and I are the only ones who know about it I will keep it secret. Now, about that incident yesterday..." Albus let his phrase trail once he found himself pinned by Harry's glare.

The green eyed boy took the bandage on his forehead off, much to Pomfrey's protests, and he traced the scar, which was still red but no longer bleeding. "I don't see how that's any of your business. Have you already forgotten our talk from yesterday?"

"Please, Harry!" Albus pleaded but Sirius stepped in front of his Godson protectively. The Animagus couldn't help but be equally concerned about his scar, though, and he glanced at Harry.

The boy sighed, acknowledging Sirius' silent question. "Voldemort knows who I am." Gasps of fear rang through the room but Harry ignored them. "It's Wormtail. He was there when I faced the Dementors and he saw my Patronuses. He reported it to Tom and Tom put two and two together. He wasn't happy, let me tell you. He's

still fuming but I'm able to handle his anger now with a stronger Occlumency wall."

Sirius and Remus nodded while the others looked at him suspiciously. "How is it you know all of this information, Harry?" Rosmerta asked for the others' sake.

Harry shrugged carelessly and got up, intent on leaving the crowded Infirmary. "Voldemort, my Voldemort, gave me that scar when I was one year of age and since that time our minds are linked whenever we feel deep emotions or simply when we want to bug each other. The Voldemort here doesn't know that and I'd like to keep it that way; it's grave enough that I feel every damn curse he puts his victims under. I don't want him to forcefully try to enter my mind. Some of my memories are...yeah, you catch my drift."

Nobody really knew how to apprehend the new information so Harry used the stunned silence to make his getaway, his Godfather and Remus running after him.

.....

"Where are we going again?"

Harry smiled at his curious Godfather who watched him walk back and forth three times in front of a bare wall. "The Marauders knew a lot of shortcuts and hidden passageways but they didn't discover everything. This-" Harry opened a door which magically appeared "-is the Room of Requirements."

He entered and let his friends take a look. "Wow! I never thought there was a room like this one in Hogwarts!" Sirius exclaimed while Remus silently took in his entourage. It didn't appear to be a room but rather a small forest within a lengthened room. There was still a stone wall near the door with a couple of chains if need be against the Werewolf, but the area was a replica of a part of the Forbidden Forest, enchanted night sky included.

Harry chuckled at their childish awe. "It doesn't stay that way, Sirius. This is why it's called the Room of Requirements. All you have to do is walk three times in front of the wall while thinking about what kind of room you need and it'll appear, whether it is just a place to relax, a dueling arena, a potions classroom, a library...basically, it can become anything to the finest detail you want it to be."

Sirius whistled. "That's bloody awesome! Too bad we never discovered it in our school days."

Remus sat down in tiredness; just two more hours and the moon would be fully up in the night sky. They also had had to run away from a couple of inquiring Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs on their way here so the Werewolf was exhausted. "Are you sure no one will come in while I'm transformed? I don't want to hurt anyone," Remus said worriedly.

Harry and Sirius sat beside him. "Don't worry. I've cast a soundproof and Notice-Me-Not spell on the door."

Remus calmed down and dozed off. Harry got up, motioning at Sirius to stay seated. "I'll be back, I just remembered something. Watch Remus?"

Sirius nodded and understood when a window appeared where Harry stopped; its view landed right on the security tower. Harry opened it and jumped out as if it was an everyday occurrence.

Seconds later the Animagus could hear powerful flaps of wings and see a black body flying toward the castle's highest tower.

Harry almost snorted when he landed silently and transformed back. Mundungus Fletcher, alias Dung, was "guarding" the prisoner...meaning he was sleeping against the cell's bars with his mouth wide open, sometimes snorting about a deal or a cauldron. Harry rolled his eyes; Dung was still Dung and nothing was going to change that.

“Stupefy,” he whispered, pointing his wand towards the sleeping man. Mundungus just froze with his mouth wide opened and didn’t even wake up.

Now that he was certain no one would bother him he leaned on the bars and smirked at the current prisoner: Magnus Manx. “So you finally woke up? Firenze did quite a number on you.”

Manx sneered from his place but didn’t get up; he knew the boy couldn’t be underestimated. “What do you want from me? I told those bastards that I wouldn’t say anything that could compromise my Master! He’ll come for me!”

Harry laughed at the man. “I don’t think so! It’s been a while so you’re out of date; the Dark Lord has new priorities than setting you free. If they’re not in his Inner Circle, Death Eaters are expendable. I don’t think you know any new information anyway.”

Manx sneered at Harry but the expression appeared to be more scared than angry. “He’ll- he’ll come for me!” Now the man didn’t quite sound so confident.

Harry rolled his eyes. “Sure.”

Manx’s eyes narrowed. “Why did you come here? Surely not only to spite me!”

Harry grinned menacingly, his eyes glowing in the quiet night. “Actually, I came here just to make sure that you would not try to escape.”

“And how do you plan on doing that?” the man asked unsurely.

Harry had all the advantages over him at the moment and Manx knew it. The boy searched the still frozen Mundungus and he grinned when he got his hands on what he was searching for. Manx’ eyes widened when Harry fingered his wand. “No...no...”

“You see, Manx, I am not as nice and lenient as the ‘bastards’, as you so fondly call them. For instance I learned, in my old world, to be as merciless toward my enemies as they would be towards me.” Harry gripped both extremities of the piece of wood and applied some pressure, just enough to make the traitor sweat.

“I’ve learned that if I don’t do that, which is considered to be one of the worst offenses in the Wizarding world, my enemies can one day re-take it and come after me.” Harry snapped the man’s wand in two and Manx moaned a long miserable note as his broken wand fell on the floor with a clatter, both extremities rolling away from the cell’s bars.

Harry took his cue and petrified Manx after he obliterated his memories of the last few minutes; all the spy would remember is that his wand is no longer usable but he wouldn’t remember who broke it.

Harry lifted the spell off of Dung –the man still slept on- and when he looked up, the moon was starting to shine in the sky. ‘I better go now.’ He transformed and flew back to the Room of Requirements just in time to see Remus starting to convulse, but less than usual.

Sirius had already transformed into Padfoot and the black dog barked a welcome before his attention fell on the Werewolf once again. Harry transformed back into his human self and waited patiently.

Padfoot whined, as if it wanted Harry to stay as an animal just to be on the safe side, but Harry shushed him and walked calmly in the direction of the now transformed, but confused, Werewolf. “Hi Moony,” the boy said softly while he offered his hand for the canine to sniff. “Don’t fight the potion. You can hear me and understand me, can you?”

Moony first growled in confusion and took a few menacing steps towards Harry but once he got a whiff of the boy’s scent he calmed down and licked the hand. Harry petted the Werewolf’s head and grinned while Padfoot barked enthusiastically and sauntered around the now gamboling Werewolf.

Harry chuckled and transformed back into his Animagus counterpart under the excited gaze of golden and blue eyes. The three animals swiftly ran into the forest and didn't get out until the moon gave its place to the sun.

.....

The teachers all knew what the Wolfsbane was supposed to do due to Harry's explanation; still, it was still a shock to see Remus up and about the following morning, looking barely tired at all. "Good morning everyone!" the Werewolf greeted joyously while he sat down at the Head table.

Sirius had the same happy grin on his face which made Harry quirk his lips upward.

"I guess the potion worked?" Albus inquired, his blue eyes twinkling madly.

Remus and Sirius glanced at each other before they chuckled. "It worked like a charm. I barely feel the after effects and I kept my mind all the while! All thanks to Harry here!" The golden eyed man ruffled Harry's hair even more until the boy swatted the hand away playfully.

A chair scrapped the floor as it was pushed backward and the teachers just stared as Severus Snape walked out of the room wearing an expression bordering thoughtfulness and frustration.

Once the Potions Master was out of sight, Madam Pomfrey turned to Harry. "Can I ask what you did to Severus the other day, Mister Potter? He hasn't been the same since the incident."

Harry shrugged. "I did a forced, reverse Legilimency attack on him. I guess it overwhelmed him. As for his present behavior, maybe he's just jealous that he isn't the one who invented the Wolfsbane." There was an odd glint in Harry's eyes when he said that, which made Remus really ponder on whom had first come up with the potion. Harry only said that he had ameliorated the original version of the Wolfsbane, not created it.

“What’s reversed Legilimency?” Hooch asked curiously while Albus frowned at Harry for using a dark art on one of his teachers in the first place, even if said teacher acted like a prick most of the time.

Harry blinked. “Just something I came up with to make Snape shut up and maybe even realize how foolish he’s been acting since I revealed who I am. Legilimency allows the caster to penetrate someone’s mind and invade the memories. I just did the contrary: I just jumbled my memories into one big ball and shoved them into his mind. The onslaught must have been too much for him. He must be really confused right now because none of the memories I sent him were complete and completely discernable. All he must hear and see are bits and pieces of thoughts and images of my past.”

“Then he’s in for a ride,” Sirius muttered under his breath. Nobody heard him.

“Is there something I can do for you Miss Granger? Mister Weasley?” Minerva asked as both students approached the table unsurely.

“Um...We only wanted to know if Harry felt better. We heard that he was sick from the other students...” Hermione started shyly and she elbowed Ron sharply when he muttered “More like screamed his throat raw and collapsed in Mr. Diggory’s arms... OW! ‘Mione!”

“Ronald Weasley, you are completely tactless,” the girl rolled her eyes in hopelessness, which made Harry laugh.

“I assure you I’m perfectly fine Ron, Hermione. Thanks for your concern, though. It’s just like old times. No, Voldemort gained some information that made him cranky and I couldn’t block my mind against this particular mood swing.”

When he saw the clueless expressions of their faces Harry knew he had to elaborate. “You see this scar?” He pushed a forelock away to reveal the famous lightning bolt scar. “It was given to me by Voldemort when I was one because a... very dark curse he wanted to

throw at me backfired quite spectacularly. That night, he gave me some of his heritage and powers, but a connection as well. Before I learned how to properly Occlude my mind in my sixth year, I felt every deep emotion Voldemort felt and I had uncontrollable visions about him. I had to learn Occlumency when he finally noticed the connection we shared and started to send me false visions and even...possess me."

Sirius and Remus who were seated on either side of him scuttled closer to Harry automatically. Albus, the teachers and the Order members were all pondering on what Harry said with grave and calculating faces.

Ron blanched and looked sick while Hermione just put the pieces of the puzzle together and gulped in fear. "What...kind of...heritage and powers?" she asked nervously.

Ron looked equally nervous. "Don't ask stupid questions, Hermione. Harry's a Potter so he's a Gryffindor through and through! No Potter could ever be a dark wizard."

Both students and a couple of teachers chuckled uneasily but stopped immediately when Harry didn't give any impression of laughing any time soon.

"Unfortunately, dear Ron, I AM a dark wizard. Evil like Tom? No. Dark? Yes. I fight for the side of light but my extensive knowledge of the dark arts places me in the dark category. I have learned to accept this fact when I realized that between white and black there was another shade: grey."

Ron didn't quite know how to take this news and took a step back; he didn't say anything, though. Harry knew that Ron would react like this so he didn't feel insulted at all.

"B-but!" Ron started to protest weakly and Harry lifted an eyebrow and sent the redhead a wistful and accepting smile.

“I won’t feel offended or think less of you if you think this is unacceptable, Ron. I know that your family is entirely rooted in the side of light and I also know that Gryffindors are really strong on house prejudices. They really think and react too hastily without analyzing the situation, which is only a Ravenclaw trait, analyzing the situation, I mean.”

Hermione blushed a tad while Minerva looked thoroughly insulted and mortified by what Harry just said. “You cannot be serious!” A few teachers were probably thinking the same thing because they were also eyeing him apprehensively.

Sirius was about to open his mouth but Remus elbowed him in the ribs and sent him a warning glance; ‘It’s not time to blurt out some old joke about your name!’ He meant to say.

“You speak as if you weren’t a Gryffindor at all!” McGonagall continued in outrage. She was probably thinking that Harry was trying to defile the name of one of her favorite past student: James Potter.

“I never said I wasn’t a Gryffindor.” Harry frowned but his expression turned back into a calm one. “However, I never told you that the Sorting Hat wanted to put me in Slytherin in my first year, no? That’s something I even kept for myself in my world.”

Minerva sucked in a breath, as did most of the people around him and she slumped in her seat, to Harry’s visible amusement. “Great Merlin!” she breathed out in consternation and blinked when Harry had the balls to chuckle at her expense.

“But, being young and easily influenced, I believed, when people told me this, that all the Slytherins were evil and on Voldemort’s side. I had to actually argue with the hat for a good couple of minutes until it grudgingly accepted to put me in Gryffindor...”

Harry stopped and a dark look crossed his face. “Maybe things would have been different if I had accepted the first choice...but I can’t go back on it now, can’t I?” A great sadness and bitterness flew out of Harry’s mouth with each word he said. “Anyway, in my sixth year I put

the hat on again just for the heck of it while Dumbledore was out of his office. I remember clearly that I didn't want to have anything to do with him at the time..."

"I wonder why," Sirius muttered darkly, sending a crossed look at Albus who didn't quite know what to say. He didn't know how Sirius had died there or what the other Dumbledore had done to make Harry hate him so much.

"Anyhow, the hat told me that he stood by his first decision but that Gryffindor was also a prominent trait in me. It said 'Your heart will always belong in Gryffindor, but your mind belongs in Slytherin.'" Harry let out a snort. "Isn't it ironic? The heir of Gryffindor in Slytherin."

Albus' head snapped towards Harry and Ron gaped. "You- you're the heir of Godric Gryffindor!"

"So you knew?" the Headmaster asked, ignoring Ron's outburst.

Harry nodded and retrieved something from his pocket, muttering the enlarging charm on the minuscule object. Albus' eyes widened. "How did you get this? Nobody knows where it was hidden all these centuries!"

Minerva strained to look at the object, which proved to be a sword. "Albus? What is that sword?"

"That sword belonged to Godric Gryffindor himself; his name is engraved on it. But we've never been able to discover where Godric hid it."

Harry chuckled and spelled the sword again. "Gryffindor and Slytherin both left things behind. You normally use one of Godric's things each year. With Salazar though, it's a little bit more complicated."

"Each year? We see something of Godric Gryffindor each year?" Ron asked, wide eyed.

Hermione hit her fist in the palm of her hand. "Of course! The Sorting Hat!"

"Leave it to Hermione to be the first one to get it." Harry said and Hermione blushed.

"I will forget the fact that you probably entered my office while I was gone-" Albus let out a pointed look at Harry, who merely smirked in satisfaction, "-to get that sword and I will ask you what you meant by the mind of a Slytherin."

Harry opened his mouth to tell him that it wasn't any of his damn business when he felt a warm sensation on his hidden left forearm. He smiled as he rubbed said forearm.

Albus narrowed his eyes considerably; this gesture was rather familiar but only coming from Severus Snape. "Are you hiding something, Harry?" he asked suspiciously.

Sirius' fist hit the table and Remus glowered. "What are you insinuating, Dumbledore!"

"Sirius Black, calm down!" Minerva snapped.

The Animagus growled. They were starting to cause a commotion and the noise in the Great Hall was starting to diminish. Ron and Hermione were backing away, not wanting to be a part of the wrangle with the easily angered Professor Black.

Parvati Patil watched all the fuss in the front like everyone else, until she noticed something moving near the doors of the Great Hall. She looked behind her but there wasn't anything...until she looked on the floor. "AHHHHHHHHH!"

Everyone jumped and turned around just in time to see her leap on a table and point at the floor. "A SNAKE! A SNAKE! MAKE IT GO AWAY!"

The children all started to scream and run away from the reptile and a few courageous people pointed their wand at it. "VIPERA EVANESCA!"

But, to everyone's surprise, the spell bounced back off the angrily hissing snake without even harming it. Harry narrowed his eyes as he heard Nagini spit angry comments and insults at the humans.

"Disgusssting humanssss! I'll bite you! I'll poissson you! I'll kill you all! All thosse eatable mudbloodssss but no! Masster wantsss me to find and ssspy on a missserable little human! But maybe I could take a bite? Or paralyze him with my venom until he sslowly diesss in agony?" Nagini let out a long hiss as she raised her body to get a shot at anyone who came too near.

That's when Harry understood that he had almost been fooled: this was Voldemort's Nagini.

Harry took his wand out and pointed it at the Cobra, slowly but surely approaching it with a wary expression.

"Harry? What are you doing?" Sirius asked curiously. 'Why is he pointing his wand on his own familiar?' he was asking himself but he quickly realized that something was very wrong with Nagini as the snake recoiled menacingly with each step Harry took.

"Nobody makes a move!" Harry said softly as he gazed in the snake's treacherous eyes. "She belongs to Voldemort and she's ready to attack at any wrong shift."

Seamus gulped. "But we're meters away...It wouldn't be able to get to us!" he said shakily.

"I'm sorry to burst your bubbles Seamus but just look at Nagini's size and length. If she wants to give herself a push she can reach you in mere seconds; you won't even see it coming."

“How is it you know the snake’s name, Harry? What do you plan to do? This snake isn’t magical so it cannot be banished. The Dark Lord probably also put strong shielding charms on it.”

The Headmaster walked slowly to Harry but was stopped by Rosmerta when the woman noticed that with each step the old man took, the snake hissed louder and swayed from left to right.

Harry frowned but didn’t detach his gaze from the snake’s. “I’ve encountered Nagini before.”

‘But why did the mark on my arm warmed up? This Nagini isn’t connected to me...Unless mine is coming and this is just a misunderstanding. Albeit an unlucky one.’ Harry thought grimly.

Said Cobra started to advance slowly and Harry reacted immediately, swishing his wand lightly as to not surprise his enemy’s pet. “Finite Incantatum!” The spell zoomed in the reptile’s direction and hit its head. Harry waited.

“What does he think he’sss doing, the pathetic human?”

Harry sighed in frustration. “This’ll get ugly. She’s not under the Imperius...” But he had the misfortune to release his attention for a second and the hissing snake lunged at him. Harry swore as Nagini coiled tightly around his body and started to choke him while preparing to take a bite.

Another scream shook the room but this time nobody dared to move when another snake slithered quickly between the tables, hissing equally menacingly...for different reasons.

“Headmaster! Another snake! Is the Dark Lord attacking! They’re identical!” Hagrid yelped with his loud voice. He loved dangerous animals but snakes coming from Voldemort...

“Repulsive follower! Evil plotter! Bad blood! Get off! GET OFF! My human! MY HUMAN! I’ll kill you!” The good Nagini hissed so loudly

that she surprised the evil one who loosened her grip on Harry and slid on the ground in front of the other.

“What magic isss thisss! Thiss cannot be!” the bad Nagini spat out dangerously while she eyed her twin carefully.

Harry panted and tried to regain his breath, and then he sneered.

No pity for the evil side.

“NAGINI! KILL HER! Kill the one who attacked me so malicioussly! Ssshe hass to die before sshe tellss anything to her masster!”

Sirius wished he had a camera right now when the people’s faces changed when his Godson spoke in Parseltongue.

It was ranging from disbelief to fear and to pure horror. Dumbledore’s mouth could have hit the ground but no one would have seen it but the Animagus who, even being aware of the seriousness of the situation, was snickering under his breath at the old man’s expense. “A gift from Voldemort...” the old man whispered in awe.

When Nagini heard Harry’s command she didn’t waste any time and launched herself against her evil twin, who retaliated just as strongly. Both Cobras coiled around each other and attempted to bite and choke the other.

Harry kept his familiar in eyesight to make sure she was winning and not the other way around. After a good couple of minutes of spitting and hissing –foul language to Harry’s ears- the green eyed boy saw his chance and stepped rather heartily on the bad one’s tail.

The evil Nagini hissed an obscene blaspheme and when she turned towards Harry it was already too late: the good Nagini had used this moment of inattention and had coiled around the Dark Lord’s servant. She bit the other’s head harshly and suffocated the servant to death.

Harry exhaled loudly and sat down on the floor when everything was over. “I never want to do that again.”

“Masster? Masster are you alright? I knew I sshould have sstayed with you! I sssensssed it!” Nagini coiled around Harry’s arms and flicked her tongue on his cheek to reassure him.

Harry petted her on the head and got up. “You did a good job Nagini. How come it took you sso much time to come back? Wass Ssalazar difficult to find?”

“No, but humans were in the foresst. Massked humans, bad oness. Fiery one had to sset bussshess on fire. The horsse beasstss were mad. The massked oness kept attacking. I had troublless finding my way back. Ssalazar had already gone too far to hunt, ssaid he would be back in two sunrissess utmosst.”

Harry completely ignored the shudders of fear that ran through the room and concentrated on his familiar. His body had become so tense Sirius and Remus were afraid that the news, whatever they were, were bad.

“The Death Eaters were attacking the Centaurss? Iss Fiery one alright? Who won the battle?”

“Fiery one iss okay, if only sslightly ruffled. The horsse beasstss were able to drive the bad humans away but I think they will be back.”

Harry sighed and nodded. Nagini hissed and flicked her tongue before she slid down Harry’s shoulders. Harry took the gauntlets off – he wouldn’t need them any longer- and, to everyone’s bewilderment, the snake slithered under his skin until her entire body was no longer touchable.

The green eyed boy smiled when Nagini stopped moving altogether and dozed off; she deserved it.

“That’s amazing!” Albus whispered as Harry walked to the dead snake still left on the floor as if the thing on his arm didn’t bother him

in the least. The kids and adults gave Harry a wide berth as he picked the lifeless Nagini up and looked at her with disdain.

“Hum, Harry dear, what are you planning to do with the snake?” Mrs. Weasley asked while she grimaced at the dead reptile.

The boy shrugged. “I’ll give her to Snape. He’ll be able to use her venom and skin for his potions. That’s about the only thing Nagini is good for anyway.” Harry felt a prickle on his arm and added quickly: “Of course, I’m talking about the evil one, not my Nagini.”

He shot an annoyed glare at his familiar whom, through his arm, was looking at him in a scolding manner. “Don’t look at me like that, Nagini! You were evil once too, you know! Don’t forget you made my life hell at one time!”

“But I wasss under a sspell, ssnake-boy!”

Harry chuckled at her comeback and looked at Remus and his Godfather. “Padfoot, Moony, can you explain my relationship with Nagini to everyone? I wouldn’t want anyone to be confused about who the enemy is and who isn’t,” Harry muttered darkly.

The Marauders nodded. “Sure thing Emeralds. You going to see Snape?” The Animagus asked curiously.

Harry nodded and walked away.

Sirius turned to Remus. “I wish I could’ve come with him. Snape’s face will be hilarious when he sees Harry’s tattoo and even more when he sees his lifeless ex-master’s reptilian servant.”

Remus rolled his eyes.

Albus rasped his throat. “Now gentlemen, could we have an explanation as to why or how in Merlin’s name the heir of Godric Gryffindor is a Parselmouth and has the Dark Lord’s snake as a servant?”

Remus shrugged. "Nagini isn't his servant, per say. She's more like his second familiar, his owl Hedwig being the first one. As for being Gryffindor's heir...yeah, but he's not only the heir of Godric anymore..."

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"So you failed to conquer the Forbidden Forest? How utterly weak you all are. CRUCIO!"

The Death Eaters screamed in agony until Riddle saw fit to stop the curse. "M-Master! For a reason we cannot comprehend, the Centaurs were all rallied at the same place! Our surprise attack did some damage but we weren't nearly numerous enough to stop them! And there was an Ashwinder, Master! It kept setting the bushes on fire, thus making us retreat! We could not do anything!" Nott babbled, trying to save his hide from another curse.

Voldemort growled and sent them away. "Pathetic, incompetent fools! But this is disconcerting...A snake, against the servants of Lord Voldemort? Why do I feel like the boy has something to do with this? Wormtail!"

Pettigrew squeaked and jumped before he groveled in front of his master. "Master?"

"Wormtail, you will tell the group to attack again. Let them rally anyone they see fit to help. Then, I want you to transform and go to Hogwarts. Spy on them."

"He, he, hi, hi, ha, ha! Yes my Lord!" was the only insane reply.

Chapter 22: Roaming rodent

Everything was at a standstill in the dungeon area. No one set foot in that area nowadays except for Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore every so often. That is, until the door of the potions classroom opened slowly out of the blue and out walked an equally silent boy.

Harry Potter glanced one last time at the man sitting at his desk before he closed the door with a soft click. The rest would be up to Severus, it seemed, but they had at least come to some kind of truce.

On his side, the ex-spy was sitting comfortably in his black leathered chair. His forehead was leaning on his hand heavily and he was still eyeing the remains of Nagini warily.

He was so stressed he called upon an house-elf and asked, more like ordered, for a glass of Firewhisky, which he immediately got before the shaking creature disappeared back to the kitchen. The man ignored the House-Elf and swallowed his drink in one go. He had a lot to think about...

Flashback (Severus' POV)

I was pacing and muttering to myself when someone knocked on the classroom door. "WHAT?" Didn't the people upstairs know that I wanted to be left alone!

I wrenched the door open and did a double take. "What are you doing here Potter?" I cast a suspicious gaze at him but damn the boy: he never wavered in fear and just kept looking at me with all the seriousness in the world.

"Will you allow me to talk or will you just insult me?"

The nerve the boy had! But I still replied that I would hold my sharp tongue until he was out of my sight. The answer appeared to be good enough because he smiled in resolution and took something out from

under his cloak –I thought he looked a little more plump than usual- and I immediately stepped backward.

“HOLY MOTHER OF MERLIN!” Potter, undeterred by my loud outburst, simply followed me in the classroom and closed the door behind him.

I had my wand out and pointed at him in a heartbeat. My arm was shaking; he saw it but made no comment.

I watched guardedly as he put the unmoving snake on my desk and sat down. His damn gaze unnerved me.

“I’m not Voldemort, you know. You can put your wand down.”

He spoke up calmly, surprising me. I sneered, trying to regain some of my lost dignity. “Then what’s that on your arm?”

Potter glanced at his arm momentarily. “You have bursts of memories not your own since I sent you to the Hospital Wing, am I right?”

What he said startled me and I remembered why I felt uncomfortable in his presence in the first place. “That’s no thanks to you! You attacked me!”

I was quickly losing patience but then he told me that I had literally started it and he defended himself. I didn’t want to admit it out loud but the whelp was right; I had pushed it a little too far the other day because I absolutely wanted something to be wrong with the boy.

I sighed tiredly and sat down in my chair. He gazed passively at my now empty glass of Firewhisky, waiting for me to say something first. “Why are you here? What’s this?” I eventually said, pointing a pale finger at the –thing- on my desk.

“I thought you could use her remains for your potions since you use Hagrid’s Ashwinder’s eggs. You can use her skin and her poison anyway.”

Potter's thoughtfulness made me think: he was not at all like his father. And how in the world did he know about Hagrid's fire snake?

"But how did you kill her in the first place? She belongs...belonged to the Dark Lord so she must've had protection spells on her." That's when he put his tattooed arm on my desk.

"That's where my Nagini comes in."

'His Nagini!' If I had been a student I would have stooped so low as to say "What the fuck?" Since I wasn't I opted for a well placed "Explain-to-me-now" glare.

"Nagini, come out please and don't hurt the man in front of you."

I reeled back and had my wand out again when the tattoo actually moved and came out of Potter's arm.

'TheboyisaParselmouth!TheboyisaParselmouth!' kept playing in my head over and over again.

"Sit down and put your wand away please. I asked her not to attack you but she will become hostile if she feels threatened and even more so if she thinks I am in danger."

I couldn't believe what he was asking of me as I gazed at the exact copy of Nagini who was watching me intently, almost daring me to make a wrong move. I didn't give her that joy and put my wand away but still close to me just in case.

"Good. Now, everyone already knows that I'm Parselmouth so you won't have to be all secretive. I just hope nothing like my second year will happen..." Potter muttered under his breath.

I urged him to continue with an impatient grunt.

"Right. I won't explain everything but in the last war I discovered that Nagini had been under Voldemort's influence all along. She asked me if she could come with me here and I accepted, as bizarre as it

sounds. When my wands merged to form one this tattoo appeared on my arm.” Potter pointed at the black marking on his left forearm.

It wasn't a Dark Mark, of that I was certain of, but I couldn't decipher what kind of writing it was. My curiosity won and he replied that it was written Parseltongue. The mark meant 'snake', as simple as that.

Potter interrupted my musings when he went on. “Every time my Nagini is near my arm feels warm but it doesn't hurt. I was almost fooled when the evil one showed up before mine but the way she talked immediately alerted me. Let's just say I was stuck in a tight position until my dear” he petted Nagini's head lovingly “arrived and warned this one.” He nodded in the dead snake's direction in disgust.

“They started to fight but since they have the same strength I used a moment of distraction to step on her tail. It gave enough time for my Nagini to strangle the other. I left Remus and Sirius in the Great Hall so they could explain to Dumbledore how I came to be a Parselmouth, if only to him and the teachers. I really need to learn to trust the people here or else they'll never trust me.”

I opened my mouth but the boy sent me a look before I could utter one word.

“I never wanted to be famous in my world.”

I blinked at the unexpected phrase.

“Famous because of something I didn't even remember; something I did when I was but one year old. Voldemort came to Godric's Hollow just like in your world. What's different though is that I survived and the Harry here didn't. Voldemort did something different here. He didn't try to kill me with...Well, here, he killed me by strangulation.”

I guess this meant that whatever happened in his world when he was a baby gave him that weird curse scar on his forehead. I didn't ask him what curse the Dark Lord had used on him; for some reason I had a feeling that this request would be pushing the limits and intruding on very personal grounds. “Why of all times did you decide

to tell me this? I did try to forcefully get information from you more than one time.”

The light in the boy’s eyes dimmed. “True, you HAVE been a pain since I got here.”

THE NERVE OF THAT KID!

I was going to give him a piece of my mind when he chuckled sadly. “But I guess that I knew I could trust you anyway if I needed help. In my world our friendship didn’t develop until the end of my sixth year. We were constantly bickering and biting each other’s heads off. You were always trying to give me detentions at the slightest wrongdoing in your class, you favored the Slytherins, you were snappish, sarcastic and always brooding. Heh! You were a Death Eater...but you were also a spy.”

My heart jumped: the boy knew that I had something vile imprinted on my left forearm. Why did it feel satisfying when he recognized that I was a spy? He said it with such a feeling of proudness too.

“You know, I never really hated you. The way you treated me, yes, but not you. You always treated me like I was an ordinary student, not some golden boy put on a pedestal just to be pitied. Actually, it was you who taught me Occlumency. It took a lot of efforts but I mastered it under your tutelage at the second attempt. The first in my fifth year...I don’t want to talk about it.”

I was surprised and I guess it showed on my face because the boy smiled. “How did we become...friends?” I asked him uncertainly.

Potter laughed and then smirked. “I guess we just saved each other’s arse one too many times.” He then sobered up. “I also wanted to talk to you about the Wolfsbane. I planned to tell you eventually. Actually, I don’t know why you haven’t been able to create it here. I guess always having Voldemort around didn’t give you enough time to complete the potion.”

“You mean...?”

“Yeah. You were the one who originally created the Wolfsbane but I was the one who perfected it so the transformation would be less painful and the taste less repulsive. Who would have known that not having you around me, staring at every movement I make and breathing down my neck, I would have some talent in Potions? Though, Defense Against the Dark Arts was and still is my favorite subject. The only class in which I beat Hermione and I’m proud of it, though I was never far behind. Being “educated” by the Dursley didn’t help when I entered the Wizarding World for the first time.”

I glared at the wall behind the boy. ‘Stupid muggles...’

Potter got up and moved to the door. His snake was coiled snugly around his shoulders. It still put me off to see Nagini but I didn’t show it; after all, her counterpart had terrorized countless Death Eaters on her Master’s wishes. Our gazes crossed before he walked out and I felt an immense relief in my head suddenly. I was thankful that he finally abated his memories’ influence in my head and I nodded at him. Yes, I had a lot to think about indeed.

End Flashback (End Severus POV)

Harry closed the door and sighed. ‘This went better than I expected.’

He was about to walk up the stairs leading to the Main Hall when he heard some noise in the shadows. His eyes instantly narrowed and with a flick of his wrist his wand was in his hand. He tensed, waiting for an attack but it never came. His eyes twitched in annoyance when he heard snickering and low whispers; he knew exactly who it was.

“Is there a reason why you would hang out in Snape’s part of the castle Fred and George Weasley?” he called out lazily.

The noise stopped. “How did you know it was us?” Fred, or was it George? asked curiously once they came out of the shadows.

Harry sighed. “I just knew. Why are you here? Just leave poor Snape alone already. He has enough pranks played on him to last a lifetime

and I'm not talking about yours. The Marauders did quite a number on him. Come on, let's get out of here, it's cold."

Both redheads followed him, eyeing the silent snake around his shoulders warily, but not in total disinterest. "What about you, Potter? What were you doing in Snape's classroom?"

"Call me Harry. We simply had a chat that was long overdue."

"Say...how does it feel to talk to snakes? Doesn't it scare you?"

Harry stared at the twins and deduced it was Fred who had asked him the question. "I'm surprised you have the balls to ask me that. I know everybody else will give me a wide berth because of Nagini. But I guess that's why I liked you both so much in my world: you were never afraid to say what was on your mind."

Both boys blushed.

"To tell you the truth, I never knew I was Parselmouth until my second year at Hogwarts. Malfoy and I were dueling when he used the Serpensortia spell. The snake was pissed when Lockhart used some wacky spell on it and I told it to hold its attack. That's when I learned I was a Parselmouth and nearly all the people in the school shunned me because of it. This knowledge couldn't have come at a worst moment because the Chamber of Secrets had been reopened and muggleborns were being petrified. It was becoming dangerous but I eventually ended this problem. Ginny was almost killed that day."

Fred and George looked at him with horrified expressions. "I don't know what the Chamber of Secret is but it sounds scary. And did you say Lockhart? Why was he there?"

"He was my second year teacher."

"WHAT!" Both twins cried out at the same time.

“Tell me about it. The Defense post was cursed. No Defense teacher lasted more than one year; either they resigned, became crazy or were simply servants of Tom in disguise,” Harry muttered darkly, thinking about Quirrell.

“That bloody sucks, mate. Who were your other teachers?”

“I prefer not to talk about them...But the single decent one out of all of them was Remus, in my third year.”

Fred and George’s eyes widened in astonishment. “Mr. Lupin has been a teacher alone in your world? What about Mr. Black?” They both mentally winced when Harry’s eyes darkened and the boy’s entire demeanor changed drastically. “Sorry mate. We didn’t want to offend you or bring bad memories.”

Harry sighed. “No, I’m the one who’s sorry. Even though I’ve learned Occlumency I still have the tendency to let my emotions get the better of me sometimes, especially when it concerns Remus and Sirius. Life hasn’t been really nice to me and I treasure everyone who is close to me. It’s Remus and Sirius who are making me feel like I’m home here so it’s only natural that I let my tight mask down around them.”

George nodded. “We understand. We only hope that you’ll consider us as your friends one day like you’ve considered the other us in your world.”

Harry smiled mischievously when he got an idea, making the twins blink at him curiously. “You’re already my friends, guys.” Harry searched around in his pockets and let out a small noise of victory in his throat when he found what he was looking for. “Engorgio.”

The minuscule pouch widened and Harry dumped it in the bewildered twins’ hands. “What? Harry? Wh-”

“I did this in my world too. There must be around five hundred galleons in there. You’ll have to start with that and I’ll give you the rest when I have access to Gringotts. I want you guys to start a joke shop and give Zonko’s a run for his money. Don’t think about giving

this money back to me. Just consider me your secret partner and allow me to have any new products you come up with.”

The redheads nodded in a complete daze. “Why are you doing this?” Fred asked breathlessly while his brother still eyed the pouch in disbelief.

Harry smiled softly. “We’re in the middle of a war. We get hurt and loose people everyday. Everyone’s moral is down. We need laughter in these times; believe me, I know.”

People were starting to flood out of the Great Hall so Fred and George hurriedly hid the big pouch.

“One last thing boys,” Harry whispered lowly so no one could hear him, “don’t tell Mrs. Weasley who gave you this money or she’ll skin me alive.”

The twins snickered before they darted to the Gryffindor common rooms.

Harry sighed when what he had predicted happened: the people were avoiding looking at him directly in the eyes and were giving him a wide berth. Only the teachers were looking at him with a contemplative gaze; McGonagall looked as if she wanted to dissect him and it gave him the chills. He leered at her and she blushed before looking away in embarrassment.

Someone gave him a friendly slap on the back. “Don’t mind them, Harry. They’re really close-minded.”

The green eyed boy gave both women a grateful look. “Thank you Rosmerta, Xiomara, but I think it’ll take some time before people accept who I truly am.”

“Where are you going Harry?” Sirius asked him when the boy started to walk away.

“I just need some fresh air Sirius. Don’t worry about me.”

The Animagus was about to follow him but Remus put a hand on his shoulder and shook his head sadly. "Don't. I think he needs some time alone."

Sirius sighed in frustration. "I just hope he'll be okay Remus."

The Werewolf knew what his friend was going through all too well. "I know Sirius, I know. He's precious, isn't he?"

"...Yeah...but if he continues to take every matter into his own hands like that he's going worn himself out."

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Harry felt as if he was being followed again as he walked along the outskirts of the Forbidden Forest. He sighed: whoever it was he was not being silent about it. "Come out. I know you're following me," he commanded with a voice of steel.

Seconds later a small form emerged, or rather stumbled, out of the Forest, sprouting apologies by the dozen and hitting its head on the ground.

"Dobby!"

The House-Elf stopped in middle apology to blink at the human boy who appeared rather shocked upon seeing him. "You is knowing Dobby? Has you ever seen Dobby before?"

Harry fidgeted but his heart still lept at seeing another familiar face. "It's a long story Dobby. But what are you doing here?" The green eyed boy could only hope that Dobby wasn't here to spy on him. He banished this train of thought to listen to the small elf's answer; Dobby was nervously shuffling around and hitting his head once again against a tree before looking around as if searching for something and hitting his head again.

“Bad Dobby! Bad Dobby! If Master learn that Dobby is here Dobby will get the punishment of a lifetime! But Dobby had to come! Yes! Bad things! Bad things will happen!” The creature was about to hit his head again but Harry quickly intervened.

“Stop that Dobby! You’re only going to hurt yourself! Now, I assume that Lucius Malfoy is your Master?”

Dobby let a keen wail out.

‘I suppose that’s my answer.’ Harry deadpanned in his head.

The elf looked too terrified to speak so Harry took one of his scrawny hands in his and he led Dobby to Hagrid’s hut where they could talk safely. Dobby’s already huge eyes widened further when the boy actually touched him. “You is great! You is Harry Potter! Dobby heard about Mister Harry Potter from his Master’s” whine “speech about unsuccessful attacks.”

Dobby nodded. “Dobby listens, yes. But Dobby doesn’t like what’s going on, no.”

Harry smiled softly when the House-Elf started to rant and mutter under his breath; it was an all too familiar sight. They sat on Hagrid’s doorstep and Dobby became silent. The Boy-Who-Lived knew that his friend would have to go soon or Malfoy would suspect something.

“Dobby, why are you here? Did something happen?” He petted the creature’s head to calm him down.

“Well...Is that a snake on Mister Harry Potter’s shoulders?” he asked in visible awe and fear.

Harry heaved a sigh. “Don’t change the subject Dobby. Why are you here?”

“Hum...Dobby heard...Dobby heard when his Master received strange guests again in his house. Nasty people. Nasty! Dobby heard that Master was planning another attack in the Forest,” Dobby

pointed at the Forbidden Forest with one of his bony fingers, "and that an animal would spy on Hogwarts." The long digit changed direction and pointed at the castle.

"An animal?" Harry asked inquisitively.

Dobby bobbed his head up and down energetically. "Yes! A rat! A rat!"

Harry bunched his hands in tight fists, making Dobby squeak. "Thank you Dobby," he said through clenched teeth, "I greatly appreciate this information. Now, when did you say the second attack in the Forbidden Forest would take place?"

"Dobby doesn't know. Dobby was serving Master and his guests some drinks when Master became angry and told Dobby to get out. That's what Dobby did."

Harry nodded seriously. "Thank you Dobby."

The House-Elf jumped up and down and squeaked in amazement. "You is thanking Dobby! Nobody ever thanked I before! You is great! Truly great, Harry Potter sir!"

Harry patted the small back, chuckling at the way Dobby spoke. "Can you do me a favor Dobby?"

The creature nodded fervently.

"You see this snake? Is there a way you can bring her close to Riddle mansion?"

"Yes! Dobby goes there everyday with his Master! Dobby has to follow his Master everywhere under his Master's orders!"

The green eyed boy nodded in satisfaction and took Nagini in his arms. "Listen girl, are you ready to go on a mission? A dangerous one?"

“Of coursse. I believe I already know what you want me to do.”

Harry smirked. “Good. Ssspy on old Voldy will you? Act like you acted when you were under the Imperiuss. Maybe you’ll actually be able to kill a few Death Eaterss on hiss command and ssecretly. Decimate hiss rankss, will you?”

Nagini hissed and Harry translated it as a sound of pleasure. He gave the snake to Dobby, who eyed the reptile with amazed eyes. The Cobra could have coiled completely around the House-Elf to choke him but that never crossed Dobby’s mind. He didn’t seem to mind the Parseltongue ability either.

“Dobby will be going now before Master knows Dobby is gone. Dobby will try to come back to see Mister Harry Potter, though.”

After a few minutes Harry realized something.

“...I can’t believe Dobby just pulled a Kreacher on Malfoy!” Harry exclaimed in astonishment.

He stalked back to Hogwarts after a few moments of silence and nearly ran into Sirius who appeared to be giving some pointers on how to duel with Death Eaters to some Ravenclaw, Gryffindor and Slytherin students. “Oi Harry! Is something wrong?” the Animagus asked worriedly when his Godson didn’t even spare him a glance.

The students stayed silent when the boy didn’t even give an answer and started to walk upstairs hurriedly. Moody, who had been listening to Black’s speech with some Aurors, suddenly pointed his wand in the boy’s direction. “Diffindo!”

The cutting spell hurled towards the green eyed boy but Harry had sensed it without turning around. ‘Damnit! I don’t have time for this now! I have to hurry before Wormtail acquires important information!’

“Praemunitio! Furnunculus!” Harry didn’t wait to see if his spells would hit and ran away.

Moody jumped away just in time and stifled a gasp; he didn't feel like having boils all over his skin. The old Auror chuckled at Sirius' and Remus' shocked faces.

"Why d'you attack him!" Black looked furious but Alastor swatted him off. "I only wanted to see if he was ready. The brat has damn good reflexes."

Sirius held his head up in pride. "Of course he's strong. He's a Potter, after all."

Remus chuckled quietly in the background at his friend's antics. "You act as if he was your son, Padfoot."

"...I wish..."

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"Why did I leave it here?"

Harry opened his trunk and took the Marauder's Map with a sour expression. "I solemnly swear I am up to no good." He tapped his wand on the map. "Find Peter Pettigrew." The mass of red dots disappeared until a single one remained. "Here you are you little traitor. Now, let's see...Find Mrs. Norris and Filch."

Filch wasn't with his precious pet, thankfully. Harry wanted Wormtail to get the fright of his life before he had his fun with the rodent. He ran out of his chambers with the map in hand and followed the cat's trail up to the fourth floor. She was licking her paws and hissing at passing students at the same time, scaring said students away before Filch had the time to show up to scare them even further.

"Mrs. Norris?"

The cat hissed at him spitefully.

Harry scowled. He was certain she could understand everything people said and yet he was feeling very stupid just by trying this. "Mrs.

Norris, there's a rat in the school. A very mean rat, a treacherous little bastard. I think it would please Mr. Filch if you caught it."

The cat's ears perked up and she stared at Harry as if she was weighing her options. Finally, she got up lazily and stretched, showing her pointy fangs and her sharp claws.

"The rat is on the second floor," he added for good measure.

Mrs. Norris licked her lips before she sauntered away to find her prey. Harry glanced at the Marauder's Map and followed the cat quickly before Filch showed up down the corridor. Twenty long minutes and a lot of fussing, running and swearing later, Mrs. Norris had finally secured Wormtail within her grasp.

Harry snickered sadistically as the rodent started to squeak in terror and tried to evade the sharp teeth coming his way.

"Mrs. Norris? Where are you my sweet?"

Harry jumped and used the cat's moment of inattention to seize the rat and run away with it, to the feline's discontent. She soon forgot about it though when Filch bent down to retrieve her. "Where have you been my pet? There's no one on this floor to scare, let's go on the fifth." He got a mew in return.

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It was third year all over again, period. Only now he wouldn't be as lenient and he wasn't in the Shrieking Shack with the terrorizing image Sirius Black represented back in that time.

Sirius Black.

Remus Lupin.

They were dead now and everything started with Peter Pettigrew when he betrayed them.

It was because of him that he didn't have any parents.

It was because of him that Sirius was falsely accused and sent to Azkaban.

It was because of him that Remus lived alone away from society.

It was because of him that Voldemort resurrected.

Harry didn't see the difference between his Peter and the other in front of him. For him it was still the same man but missing a silver hand.

As soon as the reversal spell hit Wormtail, Peter looked at him in panic before he literally crawled to Harry and tried to touch his robes. "Harry! Harry! You look so much like your fat-"

"PETRIFICUS TOTALUS! SILENCIO!" After putting the convict under the full body-bind and making him shut up before he aggravated his case, Harry pointed his wand toward the door of Moaning Myrtle's lavatories where they were currently located.

It was perfect: nobody ever came here anyway.

"COLLOPORTUS! IMPERTURBATUS!"

Pettigrew's eyes rotated wildly in their sockets when his only way out was shut and put under an anti-eavesdropping spell. The green eyed boy smiled sinisterly and added a silencing charm strong enough to cover the entire room.

Peter's eyes started to water.

"Oh yessss, Wormtail," Harry murmured in perverse pleasure, his green eyes glinting forebodingly.

Moaning Myrtle was nowhere in sight.

“You know I’m going to have fun with you, don’t you? I can smell your fear from here; it’s so thick I can taste it.”

Harry shivered.

“I’m going to make you feel everything I’ve felt since you started this shit. No one will help you now. I’m going to make. You. Scream.” Harry grinned darkly and lifted both spells off of his victim.

Peter fell on the floor and started to weep pathetically. “Harry! Harry! He made me do it! No! Harry! Your father would have never-”

“I’m not anything like my father. Ask yourself why that is, why don’t you? And I’m not Voldemort either.”

Peter flinched at the name.

“I’m not as merciful as that bastard.”

Wormtail’s beady eyes widened and he tried to transform into his Animagus counterpart, with no success. Potter considered his Lord to be merciful? This didn’t sound good. The ex-Marauder whimpered and cried, backing away until his back was leaning against one of the stalls.

‘Why can’t I-’

“Transform?” Harry smirked when the man squeaked. “How is it I can read your mind? My not-so-dear Pettigrew, you’re thinking so loudly that I don’t even have to use my Legilimency ability to know what you’re thinking. But I can use it deliberately to confuse your mind and block your ability to transform. It’s called magic, Pettigrew, and you’re about to feel it until you beg me to simply kill you. You see, Tom isn’t the only one who’s unafraid of using an Unforgivable against his enemies. CRUCIO!”

“AAAAAARRRRRGH!”

Any normal person would find this sight unattractive and unnecessary but for Harry, who was watching the man writhe in agony and scream his throat raw by trying to beg for forgiveness, of all things to beg for, it was one of the most enthralling spectacle to see.

Yet watching still wasn't enough.

In this closed and sealed room he let himself go. In this closed and sealed room he let his emotions completely rule his actions. One after the other, dark spells hit Wormtail. Slashing curses, curses that brought unbelievable pain to the heart...it took all of his willpower not to use the Entrail-Expelling curse; Harry simply didn't feel like cleaning up the mess after that.

He did use Serpensortia, though, and ordered the snakes to bite him many times. He affected Wormtail's vision with a Conjunctivitis spell so strong Harry was certain the beady eyed man would never see again. It didn't bother Harry in the least. Pettigrew didn't deserve to see Sirius or Remus or even him for that matter. He didn't deserve to see all that he had so eagerly abandoned to serve Tom Marvolo Riddle.

When he was finally satisfied he chained the traitor to the wall just in case although he doubted that Pettigrew would wake up soon. The man was a complete unconscious and bloody mess and it left an odd feeling of satisfaction within Harry. "Stay there Wormy. I'm coming back soon," Harry said with sarcasm as he took the spells off the door.

What was his surprise when someone was already behind it, one hand ready to knock. "Dudley! What the heck are you doing here?"

The hefty boy jumped and quickly lowered his hand. "I-I...Hey! You're that boy we saw in the old man's office!"

Harry rolled his eyes. "Excellent sense of observation Duddykins. Now can you tell me what you're doing here? I was wondering where Dumbledore made you stay."

Dudley glared at him heavily but it made no impact on the green eyed boy. "What did you call me? How do you know that horrible

nickname? I only wanted to go to the bathroom! Hey! What's that on your weird clothes?"

Dudley tried to touch him but Harry growled and motioned toward his wand. His weird clothes, as his cousin so charmingly called them, were covered in blood.

The Wizard smirked in superiority and tried to block the entry of the lavatories from Dudley's prying eyes. "You do know this is a girl's lavatory, right?" he drawled lazily.

"Back at you. What were you doing there? What are you trying to hide?"

Ah.

Dudley: one, Harry: zero.

With a shrug the Boy-Who-Lived let his cousin pass. The sight that greeted him made him sound like a panicked elephant. "THAT MAN'S HURT!" He was about to rush to the unconscious man when a hand stopped him.

"Leave him there. He got what he deserved. I was about to get someone to 'take care' of him. A nice cell in Azkaban would do nicely but unfortunately the Dementors aren't being very cooperative nowadays."

"YOU DID THIS TO HIM? YOU'RE A MONSTER!" Dudley cried out and turned his gaze away from all the blood and gore; the smell was beginning to make him feel sick.

Harry sneered and forcefully brought his whimpering cousin's face centimeters away from his own. "Listen –Duddykins- because I won't repeat myself. That man is a convict and has been accused of murder. You wanted to know how I knew the nickname your mother gave you? That's simple: I'm your cousin."

Dudley frowned. "I don't have any cousin on my mother's side."

“Of course since that RAT is one of the main reasons why your mother doesn’t have a sister anymore.”

Dudley gave him a perplexed look and contemplated the idea. “Mum never told me she had a sister before. I thought she was an only child.”

Harry pushed Dudley in the back so they could get out of there and find an adult who was a member of the Order. “Of course she didn’t tell you about Lily. She was a witch and Petunia hates anything that has to do with the wizarding world. Blame it on jealousy. I’m not surprised about Vernon hating it because Vernon hates anything that’s not normal in his eyes but you? What have we done to you for you to call us freaks?”

Dudley gulped. “Mum and dad told me you were no good. It’s your kind that killed everyone in Privet Drive, remember?”

“Are you going to listen to what mommy and daddy have to say for the rest of your life, Duddykins?” Harry mocked. “Come on, I know you better than that. You and Piers never did have good frequentations and I know you hid cigarette packs in the back of your last drawer.”

Dudley’s eyes widened.

“And YOU have to remember that if you’re alive today it’s because of me and the Aurors who brought you back here that day. Just stay away from ol’ Voldy and his Death Munchers...and the Dementors.”

“The who and what?”

“Long story,” the green eyed boy muttered and his eyes lit up with sadistic joy as he spotted Alastor Moody. “Mad-Eye!” Harry waved at the man to come while Dudley –tried- to hide behind his newfound cousin. “Don’t call him over! He’s freaky! Look at his eye! And his leg!”

Harry rolled his eyes once again at his cousin's antics. Alastor limped towards him and his magical eye stayed riveted on Dudley when he spoke as if he was taking pleasure at scaring the poor muggle. "What do you want Potter?"

"I have a gift for you. It's in a bad shape but it's a no refund deal. I think you'll like it anyway."

Moody's magical eye whirled around and he concentrated solely on Harry. After a few minutes of deliberation he nodded. "Lead the way."

The walk leading to the second floor was done in silence, the only sound disrupting it being Moody's wooden leg thumping on the floor in a specific rhythm. Dudley was looking around nervously and jumped every time a portrait saluted the wizards. He made Harry and Alastor snicker when the Bloody Baron flew right through him, which made the fat boy shriek like a pig.

Harry opened the door of the lavatories and shoed Myrtle away; she was muttering about ugly dying men in her lavatories but when she saw Harry a smile lit her face and she waved at him before taking a dive in a toilet.

Alastor Moody strode in the room but froze in shock when he finally noticed the trail of blood that led to a very familiar body. He lifted an eyebrow in Harry's direction but the boy shrugged, making the Auror himself shrug and smirk. "Well, well, well! What do we have here?"

Author's note: As soon as I finish this story I'm going to revamp it. This means checking for grammatical errors and the likes, facts I should have mentioned or haven't mentioned correctly, taking the notes off at the beginning and end of each chapters, etc...

Don't worry: the story will stay on when I'll do it.

If any of you wonderful reviewers have any suggestions to make the story better just say so! (Constructive criticism please) And I'm actually thinking about getting myself a beta.

FLAMES ARE NOT ALLOWED. You don't like, you don't read.

Anyway, I hope you liked this chapter!

R&R!

Love you all!

Eternal Cosmos :)

Chapter 23: Trust -part 1-

“He’s in a really bad shape. I have a hunch that you have something to do with it,” Moody finally said as he finished his inspection of Voldemort’s number one favorite. The old Auror gave the boy a suspicious glance when he noted a trail of dark magic on Wormtail but he kept silent.

Dumbledore, however, wasn’t going to let this slide when he found out.

‘The boy is old enough to know what he wants. Albus doesn’t even have an ounce of power over him. He doesn’t know enough about Potter to judge or blackmail him and I doubt the kid would care anyway. As long as Black and Lupin are on his side it’ll be enough for him.’

After leading Dudley back to his current quarters where he resided with his parents, Harry and Alastor trailed to the Infirmary; Pettigrew was levitating behind them with the help of the Mobilicorpus spell Moody cast.

The people they crossed in the corridors stared at the odd duo, but mainly Harry. The Boy-Who-Lived smirked; casting a Notice-Me-Not spell on the traitor had been a particularly bright idea.

“I’ll go find Dumbledore and try to mentally prepare him...although I’m not sure that leaving you alone with Pettigrew is such a good idea,” the old man muttered.

“Don’t worry, my anger has been sated. Can you bring Sirius and Remus back with you? This concerns them more than it does Dumbledore.”

Moody grunted and walked out. Harry marched to one of the windows and gazed at the Quidditch Pitch.

It was sunny today but the atmosphere felt oppressive; everything was still outside –no wind and certainly no laughter of children. What could have been a lovely day for a Quidditch match was transformed into an atmosphere which gave the impression that Judgment Day was coming.

Harry regretted having to use an Unforgivable but one backward glance toward the traitor was enough to make him change his mind. Wormtail had only had a taste of his own medicine and he hadn't maintained the curse long enough to be permanent. 'Maybe it made me look like Voldemort for a moment but damn it felt good.'

The hustle and bustle outside the Infirmary door made him snap out of his thoughts and apply his mental wall. The first one who appeared was, of course, Madam Pomfrey and the nurse's words died in her throat when she spotted Pettigrew.

She shrieked in fright, hesitated and then slowly trekked to the injured man on the bed when she reminded herself that, as a MediWitch, she had to tend to her patients no matter who they were or what they had done.

The next person to come in was Albus Dumbledore –with quite a grave expression etched on his face- and following closely behind were Sirius, Remus and Mad-Eye Moody. The two remaining faithful Marauders froze at the sight of Peter and Albus exploded. "WHAT HAPPENED!" he then rasped his throat, took a Lemon Drop from his pockets and sucked on it furiously. His old face went from livid to calm but it didn't stop him from frowning disapprovingly at the uncaring boy.

Poppy muttered one last healing charm and sat down tiredly. "Ugh! Severe lacerations, a heart failure, the eyes were also targeted. What's worse is that he's had Cruciatus performed on him but only for a short period of time; it won't affect him in the future."

"Unfortunately" Sirius muttered while Remus nodded his head to his friend's statement.

“Who did this to him? Voldemort got tired of him?” the Werewolf asked while eyeing the still unconscious form warily.

Mad-Eye glanced at Harry and Remus caught it. “What? Harry!”

Everyone’s gaze transferred to the calm green eyed boy. Albus stepped forward when “Haaaarrrryyy!” Sirius whined all of a sudden, “I wanted to be the one to give him a lesson!”

Needless to say it completely destroyed the morose mood. Harry gave his Godfather a meek look. “Sorry Sirius.”

“You better be! I claim first dibs on Bellatrix, though!”

The boy smirked. “As you wish.”

Albus watched the ongoing argument back and forth and glared at both of them. “Sirius Black! I am ashamed of you! How can you encourage you Godson, JAMES’ SON, to use an Unforgivable! It’s!...Well, It’s unforgivable! How many times have you used them Harry? This is a serious offense! If this information reaches public ears... I am so disappointed! You would have been sent to Azkaban for this if it weren’t for the fact that it is no longer in service-”

“PRECISELY!” Harry spat.

“This is war! If you think we’ll win with Avis or a tickling charm you’re not going to stay alive ‘till the end! I know what war does and it doesn’t excuse anyone. You’ll have to ask the kids to fight.”

Sirius sighed when Dumbledore refused to answer. “Harry, we’ve taught the kids in Defense but not to this magnitude.”

Harry frowned. “Do you mean to tell me that Tom has been alive for all these years and you never saw fit to instruct them better?”

The Marauders gave him ashamed looks. “We’ve talked about the Unforgivables but that’s about it. They’ve not seen it except those who have been subjected to it. Albus didn’t want us to include any

more dark stuff in our curriculum,” Remus finished with a haughty glance toward the stern looking Headmaster.

“I can’t believe it,” Harry muttered under his breath. “Not even the Patronus Charm?”

Albus shook his head and gave him a surprised look. “The Patronus! No one would have been able to foretell that the Dementors would flee Azkaban to join the Dark Lord. And anyway, the Patronus is Auror level. No student, Miss Granger included, would be able to perform it.”

“Pfft! It’s certainly not Trelawney who would have been able to foresee that! And you made bloody sure that no one would be able to use it,” the boy whispered in disdain. “Damn it! I’ve been able to perform that spell since my third year! I’ve defeated a Mountain Troll in my first year! Don’t you even have the least bit of fate in your students?”

Albus opened his mouth but closed it with an audible snap when he couldn’t find a reply.

Harry sighed heavily and sat down. “So, to resume, you don’t have much prepared for this war. True there are hundreds of adults here but some of them have never even cast half of the offensive and defensive spells I know. The students would be easy targets in the school. Voldemort has hundreds of Dementors, Death Eaters, snakes and probably a couple of Werewolves as well. Granted, maybe the fight won’t be on a full moon but Werewolves, even in human form, are stronger and have effective healing abilities. Just look at Remus!”

Harry pointed in the direction of an embarrassed Remus and Dumbledore had the decency to look dejected. The black haired boy rolled his tired eyes heavenward and then leaned his face in his hands. “Did you really defeat Grindelwald?”

Albus opened his mouth to reply but he frowned and closed it when he understood that it was a rhetorical question. “I fought with him but

it was in a duel, not in the middle of a war. The circumstances now are different from then."

"You're just lucky I'M prepared."

"What do you mean?"

A moan interrupted Harry's answer and all heads swayed in Wormtail's direction. "Ugh! Where am I?" he asked fearfully while looking around and blinking in all directions. "Where am I?"

Madam Pomfrey frowned, caught the wild man's face with her hands and she checked his eyes. "Pettigrew is blind."

The man jumped when he recognized Poppy's voice.

"Um...Oops?" Harry offered as an insincere apology.

The Headmaster found the courage to glare at Harry but when his target didn't budge he aimed for Peter who had to be restrained to the bed by Alastor. "Do you know where you are, Mister Pettigrew?" he asked stiffly.

The convict whined.

"Oh, he knows where he is, alright. The real question is: do you know who's in the room with you?"

When he heard Sirius' taunting voice Pettigrew went suddenly still and started to cry and babble incomprehensively.

SLAP!

Peter shut up when Sirius slapped him. "Finally!" The Animagus heaved a long sigh.

Remus snickered. "You've wanted to do that for a while now, haven't you?"

Sirius cracked his knuckles dangerously. "Among other things. Hey Poppy? Can you cure his eyesight or is his blindness permanent?"

Even Wormtail waited avidly for the answer as the MediWitch muttered a strong ocular healing charm. "Nope. The damage is permanent." She eyed Harry disapprovingly while Peter started to wail.

"NOOO! W-what will Master say!"

Remus hit the back of Peter's head rather roughly and Mad-Eye answered him: "If I were you I would be more worried about us than your –Master–," he growled in disdain. He hit the man with a sleeping spell so Wormtail fell back on the bed.

"What are we going to do with him?" Everybody gazed at the Werewolf, and then at the man in question.

"We can always try to extirpate some information from him but I doubt he'll cooperate," Albus suggested with a heavy sigh.

Harry snorted. "It wouldn't work just like that. You would need a truth serum or the stronger version: Veritaserum. Legilimency would be alright but I don't think Wormy has a lot of info to give us,"

"Um Harry? To use Legilimency would need the caster to look into the eyes of the victim, right? Wormtail can't see anymore," Sirius reasoned.

His Godson smirked. "That's beginners' Legilimency. I can do it without looking but if you don't trust me to do it you can always ask Snape. I'm sure he'll be thrilled to help. I know I won't need anything he'll say either way."

'...Because Nagini is probably doing a bang up job of fooling Voldy this very moment...' he finished in his head.

Albus shook his head negatively. "We'll try the truth serum first."

Harry grunted. “Hn. Party pooper,” he muttered under his breath, and then lifted his head to cross gazes with the old man. “If you don’t need me anymore I’m going. I still have a lot of things to do.”

The Headmaster quickly cast the locking charm on the door before Harry could take one step further. “Wait a minute young man! Don’t think you’ll go free after using an Unforgivable!” Albus’ back stiffened in an imposing façade and magic started to be felt around him, making Harry remember how powerful Dumbledore really is.

However, he too had a hidden card so he didn’t back away like the others did. “What will you do? Give me a detention?” He snickered at the thought. “You don’t hold any jurisdiction over me.”

“That’s why I can attack you if need be.”

“Will you really attack the Chosen One?” Harry asked haughtily; he didn’t like to use that description of his –function- but it stopped Albus from answering with a witty comeback.

Everyone could detect a hint of warning in the younger man’s voice and both men stared at each other for a good couple of minutes until Harry smirked and used the counter curse on the door wandlessly.

The answer in Albus’ eyes was evident.

“That’s what I thought. You should really start trusting me Dumbledore. Respect is earned, not given freely. I’m tired to argue with you like that. Now if you’ll excuse me.”

Sirius and Remus followed him.

“You should either leave him alone or let him put his plans in action instead of berating him and try to control him constantly.” Alastor left the room.

Poppy gazed at her old friend patiently. “I’ll let you decide what to do with Mr. Pettigrew, Albus. Although I’m not supposed to reason like this I’ll tell you what I think: that –man- deserved everything James’

and Lily's son did to him. And I'm certain that a part of you, as much as you loathe admitting it, is agreeing with me."

Dumbledore walked to the same window Harry had been gazing through before they entered. "Everything changed since Harry arrived here. Everything went by at an alarming pace. Voldemort acted way faster than usual when he would probably still be hiding beneath the surface. I can no longer ignore it: Harry Potter has installed fear, or at least apprehension, in Voldemort's blackened heart if the man can no longer wait."

Albus sighed. "I think I'll let him do what he wants for now until this war ends. I'll give him the benefit of the doubt."

Poppy smiled softly in response.

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Auror Whitcombe was on the lookout with Arthur Weasley and scouting the borders of the Forbidden Forest when he started to shake. The man's brown eyes widened in realization and he poised his wand at the ready. "Expecto Patronum!"

An Ox sprang forth and it alerted Arthur who, in turn, brandished his own wand and shouted the spell. A silver Fox joined the Ox but even teamed up they were starting to fade in and out of existence; the ground and trees were starting to freeze in the dark forest and it was spreading...fast.

Whitcombe grunted in exhaustion so he turned to his comrade. "Arthur! Go back to Hogwarts and alert our forces! GO! I'll try to hold them here! Hurry! Please don't look back!"

Arthur stepped back and stuttered "B-but what about you-"

"GO!"

The red headed man gasped and ran away. In the background, the strident cries of the Dementors echoed eerily and Arthur disobeyed

the order of not looking back...just in time to see his friend being lifted off the ground and getting his soul sucked out.

“ SHIT! Whitcombe!” Arthur fought the tears of disgust and powerlessness and ran as fast as he could to alert the castle’s inhabitants to avoid unnecessary deaths.

Many froze and shrieked in fright when the main doors banged open. “Dementors! Near the Forbidden Forest! Where’s Dumbledore?”

Ron and the rest of his brothers and sister, along with Molly, ran to Arthur and helped him stand up; the man’s face was pale and he was badly shaking.

“Ron! Go fetch Madam Pomfrey! The Headmaster won’t be too far away!”

Hermione helped Molly to calm down. “I’m sure he’s with Madam Pomfrey. I saw Auror Moody ask him to come to the Infirmary for some reason.”

Ron skedaddled when a bunch of Aurors and parents equipped to fight ran outside where the temperature was starting to drop.

“Dumbledore! Dumbledore!” He yelled the old man’s name until he arrived on the right floor.

Albus was quick to turn around. “What’s wrong Ronald?”

“Dementors! Madam Pomfrey! Dad! Need help! Forest!” Ron panted, making no sense whatsoever. But it was enough for the bearded man to understand so he quickly followed Ron, along with Poppy after she took hold of her medical bag and a big supply of chocolate.

The red head was running at full speed but was forced to a stop when the old man skidded to a stop in front of a portrait. “What are you doing Albus?” Poppy asked once she was able to join them, perfectly reflecting Ron’s thoughts.

“Behind this portrait are Harry’s quarters. I should ask for his help.”

The nurse smiled tightly as if urging him to hurry and asked Ron to lead her to his father. “Please be quick!”

The old man nodded and they disappeared down the corridor; he knocked on the door until a pissed Sirius opened it. “Headmaster? What’s the matter?” The Animagus’ face quickly went from groggy to solemn when he saw Albus’ face.

“We need Harry. Mr. Weasley has been attacked by Dementors near the Forbidden Forest and I doubt that Auror Whitcombe has survived since he has not come back with Arthur, or so the portraits told me while I was getting down there.”

A cloaked figure bolted between them and vanished down the corridor.

“Harry!” Sirius exclaimed in surprise.

Remus also walked out stiffly. “He was listening to you two until he heard the words Dementors and Forbidden Forest. After he just gathered his things and ran away,” the Werewolf explained as they made their way downstairs.

The students had been sent to their common rooms when they arrived and Poppy was already tending to Arthur Weasley. “Where’s Harry?” Black asked worriedly.

The people gave a grim look toward the exit doors. Remus shook his head and held Sirius back. “Call the students back in the Great Hall. Harry knows what he’s doing Sirius, just have faith in him. Right now he wouldn’t want us to loose our heads but to teach the kids how to defend themselves against a dark army. Let’s do this.”

Minerva McGonagall tightened her lips and stayed planted right where she was. It was Xiomara who clapped her hands and barked out: “You heard the man! Let’s call the children and teach them something useful!”

Minerva opened her mouth but Rosmerta put her hands on the strict woman's shoulders. She shook her head sadly. "It's the best we can do Minerva. You know it as well as we do."

The Transfiguration teacher's shoulders sagged as she let out a small "I know."

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Harry ran and ran. The freezing air was starting to get to his lungs but he didn't let it deter his will, especially when he noticed, even at a fair distance, the lifeless body of Whitcombe lying on the ground and a dozen of Dementors still hovering over it. Half of the group was also down a little farther away and being trapped by the soulless creatures.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

Moony and Padfoot sprang forth and dashed in the forest's direction while Prongs rushed to defend the group. "Merlin, I hope I'm not too late! They can't die! We need them to win this war! I should have gone to them as soon as I received their letter!"

To be continued...

Hope you've enjoyed! I can't promise any date for the next chapter but I want you all to know that I'm NOT letting this story down. My father just is my top priority at this moment.

Review!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos

Chapter 24: Trust –part 2-

It was utter pandemonium in the forest. Aragog, his mate and their children were now well hidden, trying not to bring the wrath of the Dementors upon themselves whereas the Unicorns had all fled the area a while ago.

Only the most powerful and darkest creatures remained in the forest, like the Thestrals and the ghouls, for example, as they were immune to the Dementors' kisses because of their sinister disposition.

Others, like the Leprechauns and the Trolls, were desperately trying to defend their homes against the foul creatures; the Leprechauns had their immense treasure to guard and were unable to move it to a safer place in time –though the Dementors held no interest whatsoever in their fortune- and the Trolls were simply too stupid to run away.

However, the Dementors were not at all interested in those creatures because not too far away a battle was raging on, a battle that was being slowly won by the soul sucking creatures. The clan of Centaurs had been separated in several little groups by the Dementors as soon as they arrived; a clever tactic worthy of Voldemort's genius. Separate the old, the females, the warriors and the young and concentrate the forces on the strongest opponents first, that's what they were doing now.

The group of warriors was now trying to hold its ground against the swoop attacks by using spears and arrows whenever the enemy came within arm's length. Needless to say they were having quite a bit of difficulty.

Deep within the forest, two silver lights shone brightly in contrast with the frightening darkness. Moving at great speed, one would have thought them to be ghosts when in reality they were Patronuses.

Harry was nowhere in sight; he had opted to transform and was now soaring high above the wooded area, trying to locate the herd of

Centaurs. Scared birds and Pixies momentarily crossed his path and he clacked his beak at them angrily.

An Augurey squawked indignantly and it started to rain.

Harry could have rolled his eyes. 'This is just what I needed. Damn it!'

When his path cleared he spotted the unfortunately familiar mass of black ripped cloaks soaring barely above the trees so he dived. Padfoot and Moony were circling something on the ground and he immediately de-transformed when he spotted what it was.

"Shit! The old Heracles!"

The elder lay unmoving on the cold ground, alone. Harry closed the old half-beast's eyes and paid his silent respects while he scrutinized his surroundings. There was no real sign of a struggle so the attack on the council leader must have been quick and painless. No doubt it had caused terrible panic in the ranks.

Padfoot nudged Harry's hand and he went back to his Animagus form.

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"Come on Zargoth! We have to keep pushing them back!" Zargoth, one of the warriors of the blue clan, grunted as he fired another arrow at the nearest Dementor.

"I know Grim! But as soon as I wound one, another takes its place! My body will not be able to hold their draining effect forever!"

His friend Grim, also from the same clan, merely told his comrade not to give up even if he himself was worse for wear. There was a hundred or so warriors around them from different clans plus some unfortunate souls sprawled on the ground who did not resist the repeated attacks.

As a mass of Dementors was preparing a combined swoop attack that was sure to eradicate them, an intense silver light illuminated the

area. The nearest soul suckers disintegrated while the others screeched in pain.

While most recoiled, two of them latched successfully on Thor, a blond coated warrior from Alta's tribe. Thor tried to get them with his sword and thumped his hooves angrily, trying in vain to dislodge the foul creatures.

The mysterious light brightened and something jumped on the Dementors at the last second. Thor gaped as a silver wolf, no, Werewolf, accompanied by a silver dog viciously pounded the dark creatures into the ground and bit them ferociously. They immediately let out agonized screeches and vanished into thin air.

The group of warriors let their guard drop in front of the Patronuses and a Griffin flew to them and transformed into Harry.

"Isn't this a pleasant surprise! The human Firenze spoke so much about!"

Harry smiled grimly. "I came as soon as I got wind of the battle. I should have been more on alert, though, forgive me."

A reddish coated Centaur made his way to Harry; he was partly covered in blood and limping slightly from a wound on his foreleg but if it hurt his pride never showed it. "What's important is that you are here to help now. The Dementors have separated the whole tribe. We are worried about the children. So I ask you: please find them and bring them to Hogwarts with you. This is a highly unorthodox demand but the elders would have agreed with me if they were here, especially Master Heracles," Altaïr added when some of them started to argue.

Harry's eyes saddened. "About Heracles..."

"What of him?" Zargoth lifted a thick eyebrow.

'So they don't know' the boy thought mournfully. "I came across him in the forest-"

“Really! How are the elders faring?” Grim pressed, interrupting Harry.

The boy sighed and motioned for Moony to go in the direction of some shouts for help deep in the forest. “We don’t have much time. This will probably sound heartless but Heracles is dead. The other elders weren’t with him so it’s a sign of hope, at least.”

Deafening silence greeted his statement until they all exploded in a unique fit of rage.

“Impossible!”

“That’s unthinkable! Our most venerate elder!”

“Those creatures will pay! Voldemort will suffer the consequences dearly!”

Harry actually took a step back; it felt like a stampede under his feet. ‘If Tom actually thought that they would surrender under such an assault he was dead wrong. It just made them stronger. Idiot.’

The boy watched as Altaïr trotted to him, his expression severe but voice under the most perfect control. “We will fight the Dementors. Find the young ones and the females, if possible, and then bring them back to Hogwarts. We’ll try to find the elders; Firenze and Bane are probably still with them and they are able warriors.”

That’s when Harry noticed that Altaïr had the same red coat as the aforementioned Centaurs. “You’re in Firenze’s tribe?”

Altaïr nodded briskly in response. Harry told Moony to follow them when the Patronus came back and they went on their way. “Come on Padfoot, we have to find the kids.” He transformed back but this time galloped on the ground; he didn’t want to miss them.

Padfoot led the way and barked silently at each passing Dementor. Even in all this chaos Harry considered it to be a lucky day: he found

the females easily because of their battle cries and to top it all the children were all huddled together tightly inside the circle the women had formed to protect their progeny.

The Griffin and the dog quickly got rid of the hellish nuisances and rallied everyone, to their great astonishment. "Harry!"

The boy smiled when he noticed his friends Vega, Mathias and Orion, safe and sound, if only a little ruffled. "Hey guys! You'll have to follow me. I met with the group of warriors and they told me to bring you back to Hogwarts with me."

The females gave him sceptical looks but didn't dare contradict him; he had saved them and was in Firenze's good graces, plus if the children liked him they could definitively trust him. "We'll follow you. Lead the way," a black coated female said while the troop tightened the formation.

Harry didn't transform back so Mathias let the human ride him just for the fun of it, to the children's bewilderment. Xi, the female who had spoken earlier, walked in strides beside Mathias while keeping a close eye on everyone.

Padfoot kept running around them in circles to prevent any Dementors from approaching until the Patronus light brightened and Prongs joined them. "Where does it come from?" Vega asked curiously, pointing at the majestic deer.

"It was fighting Dementors at the outskirts of the forest. They must be all gone if Prongs is still here," Harry offered as an explanation. Padfoot barked silently but happily at Prongs and they resumed their watch together.

After a couple of needless bad encounters, Harry finally noticed the small shivering form huddled between Orion and another "teen" Centaur he had never met. Vega noticed where his gaze lay and explained: "The little one is called Trix. His mother was killed by the Dementors so Orion and Strauss are taking care of him until we can find Trix's father. He's only fifteen years old so he can't take care of himself alone."

“That’s nice of them.”

The rest of the trip was spent in silence, except for the occasional Dementor screech. No one was around to welcome them at the edge of the forest, no one alive, that is. Several bodies littered the floor and Harry was pained to recognize some of them as good Order members.

The group was very adamant about walking out of the dark wooded area but Harry reminded them that war was everywhere and that casualties were to be expected, even at Hogwarts which, at the moment, was the safest stronghold against Voldemort. Well, Gringotts was safer but the Goblins refused to let humans invade their precious bank.

“Are we going inside the castle, Harry?” Vega asked out of the blue.

The older females looked appalled by such an idea.

“I know this won’t bode well with some of you but I’m supposed to keep you safe until the return of the males. We can’t stay out in the open like this and all of you know it. I will ask Dumbledore for a secluded room.”

The group tightened in response and Harry was forced to get off Mathias’ back less his legs were crushed between two over-protective females. Van, a seventy five years old from Bane’s clan, fidgeted beside him when he pushed the doors open.

The main hall was silent so Harry thought that everyone was asleep, until McGonagall showed her face from beyond the Great Hall’s doors. “Oh dear Merlin’s ghost! Albus, he’s back! No! You stay here! Mr. Potter has...company! Go back to your seat Mister Creevey!”

Harry tried not to laugh when Minerva quickly closed the doors so the curious students stayed inside. Dumbledore reopened the doors minutes later with a frantic Sirius and Remus by his side. They all froze when they noticed the boy’s special guests.

“Merlin’s balls...” the Animagus muttered under his breath.

Albus was the first one to regain his bearings. “I assume you and your friends will want to stay here for a while?”

Harry nodded. “Yeah. They’ll stay here until the return of the males. I don’t think they’ll want to stay cooped up inside for too long.”

Now it was Xi who nodded. “Quite right but thank you for your hospitality.” She seemed to force the words out but if it showed Dumbledore didn’t comment on it.

“Follow Harry, then. I’m certain he knows the best place for you to go.”

Harry smirked. “The Room of Requirements, and I now just the way to take without being seeing.” He walked away with the reluctant group in tow but not without sending a “we’ll-meet-in-my-quarters-later” look at his two Marauder guardians.

“What is this Room of Requirements, Harry?” Vega asked once they were out of earshot.

“You’ll see once we get there but I think you’ll like it. Open” he hissed to a blank stone wall in a secluded dungeon area. The Centaurs were surprised to see the wall turn into a huge doorway big enough to fit the whole clan, and then some.

“This is one of many passageways Salazar uses to move around freely in the castle, pipes not included. It’s a real labyrinth in there but I’ll find my way. The room is on one of the highest floors.”

They started to trek silently in the tunnel, Harry’s wand tip producing all the light they need. The little Trix once asked who Salazar is and simply kept quiet after Orion told him Salazar was a fabled Basilisk.

“We’re here. Wait a few seconds please. I solemnly swear I am up to no good.” The Marauders Map became alive in his hands. “Good.

There isn't anyone around. Filch and Snape are in the Great Hall but that doesn't mean we can dally."

Harry paced three times in front of another wall until a door appeared. The half-beasts were all in awe in front of the forest inside the room.

"I think I will revise my judgment of Hogwarts. This castle truly is full of surprises," Xi said once the youngsters started to run around, momentarily forgetting about the traumatizing experience they went through not too long ago.

Harry smiled softly at her own softening expression. "I will leave you to settle and I'll bring the men once they reach Hogwarts. You don't have to worry as long as you stay in this room; I made it to be unplotable and if you need something just think about it really hard and it will appear."

Xi nodded and rallied the group to make camp while Harry walked out of the room and out of the castle once more.

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"What is your plan, my Lord? Do we try to get Pettigrew back?"

Tom Riddle glared at Lucius Malfoy. "Are you happy, Luciusss? Of coursse you are; your eyess and thoughtss betray you."

"M-my Lord! I would never rejoice of your misfortunes!"

Tom's red eyes narrowed dangerously. "Liesss. You dare lie to me! CRUCIO!"

The blond aristocrat writhed on the floor in visible agony. The other Death Eaters, his own son included, watched the spectacle with sympathetic winces.

"To ansswer your quesstion, though, no, I will not do anything. I will not jeopardize my plan to resscue the rat. He doessn't know enough

to put my plans in danger so if he wants to get out he'll have to find his own way."

"Master!" A man as huge as Vernon Dursley rushed in the room, panting in exhaustion.

"Karkarov. Such an undignified entrance. To what do I owe the displeasure?"

Karkarov shuddered and grovelled pitifully on his hands and knees up to his master's robes to kiss the hem of them. "My Lord! The attack on the Centaurs has been thwarted! It's that boy with the three Patronuses! The Centaurs are all out of the forest and on his side in Hogwarts! The Dementors came back in fewer number than when they left!"

Karkarov shut up when he started to feel his master's malevolent magic flux.

"WHAT? That-that boy!"

Beside him a snake started to get restless and it hissed at the shaking man and other Death Eaters, whom were slowly starting to back away.

"Yes, of course you can play with him. His failure will serve as an example for the others," Voldemort hissed right back in a disgustingly sweet tone.

The snake slithered over the shivering ex Durmstrang headmaster and wrapped itself around Karkarov, who started to panic and cry out incoherently for his master to forgive his failure. The man moved too much so the snake hissed and embedded its fangs inside the man's throat and choked him. The Death Eaters flinched visibly when the snake finally let go of Karkarov who fell boneless on the floor.

Tom lifted an eyebrow in incredulity at his pet. "This is the sixth time this week that you lose control, Nagini. This isn't like you."

Nagini slithered up to her “master”. “I apologize, but I cannot bear to sssee sssuch failure amongssst your ranksss, Masster.”

“Hm...You are right but sssee to it that it never happenss again.”

“Of coursse.”

Nagini could have applauded her acting skills if only she had hands. But now if Voldemort didn't accept the free killing anymore she would have to do it secretly. She had already taken care of four Death Eaters and two Werewolves and by the time Voldemort discovered the deceit she would be long gone, back under Harry's wing.

Dobby the House-Elf was coming everyday with the Malfoy family and had enough time for himself to check on the snake's health to report it back to Harry. He had to iron his hands at least two times a day but it was well worth it.

.....

Pettigrew brusquely woke up to the unpleasant sensation of being kicked in the ribs and he yelped in pain when it added to the wounds he had previously obtained.

“Wake up you big good-for-nothing lump of shit! You've slept long enough!” a rough voice, no doubt belonging to the owner of the foot that had just kicked him, said in disgust.

The rat Animagus moaned in pain when his ribs protested greatly against all movements and he furiously started to rub his eyes. “What's going on! Where am I? Who's there!” he cried out in terror when everything remained black.

He got slapped on the cheek. Hard.

“Calm down you idiot! We're in the security tower of Hogwarts. It's me, Manx. I think you've been drugged with Veritaserum 'cause when they dragged you here you were completely out of it.”

The ex teacher frowned when Wormtail continued to look around furiously and when his gaze fell a little more at his left than him Manx took the other's dirtied shirt in hands and shook him. "Come on, man! Concentrate a little! What are you, blind?" he mocked.

Peter whined. "YES! I AM!" And he started to wail as Manx let go of him in surprise.

"Well shit. I'm stuck with an unstable cry-baby in a tower that's probably been loaded with hexes, curses and anti-apparition wards and who won't even be able to help me escape 'cause he's blind!"

Pettigrew heard, rather than saw, Manx shuffle around and sit down in a huff. "Well s-o-r-r-y! I haven't heard of you trying to escape!" he countered snappily and sat down himself, closing his sightless eyes. He snapped them open seconds later and started to wail again.

"What now?" Magnus Manx snapped.

"I-I can't transform! WhaAaaAa!"

Manx rolled his eyes and snorted. "Idiot. I told you this tower was loaded with protection spells. Like they would let you transform and run away right under their noses now that they've got you. And stop wailing, the sound is deafening me and irritating the Hippogriff guarding the cell. Count yourself lucky you can't transform; you could have been eaten as a hors-d'oeuvre right as you passed the bars."

On cue, a screech resonated through the air, which made Pettigrew cringe and shut up. "Right."

There. A little short but all I could do for the moment. I've started school again but the main reason why my updates are so few and far in between is because my dad's still in the hospital so it's cutting my concentration a lot. He's slowly, very slowly, but surely getting better, thank God.

Anyway, thanks again to everyone who reviewed and hoped for my father to get better. It really encouraged me. Continue to review and don't worry, I'm still there and I'm not letting this story go. I've even started to re-write some of it already and it'll be re-posted when the story will be entirely finished. See you all soon, I hope!

Review!

Love ya all!

Eternal Cosmos ;)

Chapter 25: Nagini's collection (Interlude)

Riddle manor was immense: a three stories house with as many, if not more, traps than the great Hogwarts. However, for one with as much experience with this death trap of a mansion like Nagini, whose memory was infallible, it was no problem at all to move freely around.

What was great for our favourite spy was that personal callings from Voldemort aside, she could move freely wherever and whenever she wanted and was a symbol of respect and fear to Tom's servants. All the more, she was privy to all the information going around since she had to be present to all the gatherings. However, there was no gathering right now and the master of the house was out to do some more of his dirty deeds, meaning that Nagini had the chance to strike without fear of being caught.

“What do you think our Lord will do when he gets his hands on the Potter brat?”

Nagini stopped in the middle of the corridor and slithered in the shadows when she heard two approaching Death Eaters debating on the fate of her master. They walked so quickly that she didn't have the time to hear the response, but she obviously knew it had to be something nasty. “I'll ssstart with thossse two.”

Quickly, but stealthily, she followed the scent of the servants and was overjoyed to see that they had organized a little reunion since Voldemort was absent from the mansion. She made a count and decided that twenty Death Eaters was not totally impossible to deal with; she would only need to act fast and get the hell out of there as soon as Dobby came back with his current Master, Lucius Malfoy. Too bad the blond aristocrat wasn't there; she would have had a lot of fun biting him.

She slithered in the shadows the room provided and moved to another room, connected with this one and providentially deprived of a source of light. Her plan was simple: lure a Death Eater in the room by making some noise and strike like lightning. Another would see if everything is alright and she would strike again.

She used her tail to make an ashtray fall from a table and hissed quietly in victory when she heard a man wonder about the noise. Slowly, dangerously, she poised herself for an attack and then...

STRIKE!

The shocked Death Eater slumped to the ground after a couple of seconds and Nagini uncoiled from around the man's neck. "One down, nineteen to go."

"Did you hear that Wilkes? It came from the other room."

"You're imagining things, Brahms."

The sound of quiet footsteps echoed once again in Nagini's direction. "I'm telling you I heard something." But there was no response from his comrade, except maybe a quiet scoff of indifference.

Nagini attacked again as soon as the one called Brahms advanced in the shadows in which she had chosen to hide both herself and her first victim. This time she was more experienced and not a sound came out of the Death Eater's mouth when he slumped to the ground, even though it took him a little more time to die.

Nagini's tongue tasted the air, her fangs, smeared with the man's blood, poking out dangerously from the gesture. "Hmmm. Thiss one wass a Werewolf. Ssstubborn creaturesss."

For a moment there was only silence as Nagini pulled the second body next to the first one.

"Brahms? What's taking you so long? Brahms? Oi, Derrick! Come with me, Brahms is trying to trick us."

A snicker.

"The idiot. Take your wand out, we'll get him."

Hm, this would prove to be a little more difficult for Nagini.

The men came in with their wand at the ready and both looked around curiously when they didn't see their comrade. "Brahms? You idiot, come out of your hiding place, you're not fooling us!" Wilkes called out with a gruff and impatient voice.

As soon as he set foot in the shadows of the room he yelped and fell brusquely on his back.

Derrick turned around and pointed his wand in the other Death Eater's general direction but he snickered and relaxed when he spotted Wilkes on the floor, rubbing his sore back and muttering obscenities under his breath.

"My, my, Wilkes. You're so full of grace today." Derrick laughed and walked in his friend's direction, putting his wand back where it belonged.

"It's not funny Derrick. I swear something caught my ankle and pulled me down!"

"Oh, come on! You probably just tripped on something." He tried to prove his point by stepping in the shadows but his breath caught in his throat when he, too, felt something around his ankle and pull hard, making him land in the same painful position as Wilkes.

"Damn! What the fuck was that!" he spit out, trying to see in the darkness while his friend continued to laugh his ass off, hurting his sore pride even more.

They were so caught up in their own little world that they didn't even see the heavy, scaly tail hurl toward their heads. It then coiled around their tangled legs and pulled them in the darkness. Nagini's collection kept growing, slowly but surely.

There was now sixteen Death Eaters left to deal with. Nagini hid again but no one came in the room to check on the four missing men. It was time to get risky and count on her status of Voldemort's familiar.

She spotted a precious looking vase and deliberately pushed it off the table. It fell on the floor and broke with a crash.

“What was that?” A voice asked on the other side.

Many loud footsteps later, six death Eaters came in the room with raised wands. “Is somebody there? Show yourself!” one called out menacingly.

Something moved in the shadows.

“Stupefy!” The spell rebounded unexpectedly and hit the caster who was, no surprise there, Theodore Nott, ex-Slytherin.

“Theodore!” Nott, the father and experienced Death Eater, knelt beside his frozen son. “Finite Incant- What’s that?” He asked suddenly when the “thing” slowly came out of the room’s dark spot.

The five others immediately pointed their wand in the right direction but quickly lowered them when they recognized the slithering terror that was their Master’s pet.

“Jeez, it’s only Nagini,” Travers said while raking a hand through his hair.

“What is it doing here?” Barty crouch Junior sniffed in disdain.

Nagini secretly bristled at his tone of voice.

“How should I know?” Terrence Higgs snapped back, equally pissed at the snake’s presence.

“Probably here to scare us just for the fun of it, again. I swear, that thing can understand what we say sometimes and is doing all it can to piss us off. Did you see how it killed Karkaroff? Mental that thing is.”

‘You have no idea, you ssstupid human’ Nagini thought while she slithered across the room freely, more and more in their direction.

She used her huge length to her advantage. In a swift shove she swung her tail at them, effectively making them drop to the ground before they could even utter a word. She was already upon them when they regained their bearings.

Each bite was fatal.

Theodore Nott, still paralyzed on the floor, started to freak out. His eyes kept moving left and right, trying to see what was going on, but without success. After a few almost soundless thumps, an eerie silence encompassed the dimly lit room.

Then, a hiss.

Low and weak at first, but gaining volume quickly.

His eyes moved to his left side slowly. His insides were shaking. He was probably sweating all the water of his body out but could do nothing about it in his current condition.

The hissing sound was now right by his ear.

He didn't want to turn his eyes on the other side; he dreaded what he would see. He knew, he was no fool even if he was only seventeen, a young Death Eater in the making.

Eyes riveted or not on her, Nagini didn't have a care in the world. Since her target was frozen, there was no need to apply much pressure on the boy's neck.

Nott's eyes widen in pain for a brief moment until they started to close gradually. The last thing he saw was a scaly green blur slowly gliding away.

Nagini hid the six bodies with the others. No remorse for the dark side.

Now was a great time to act against the rest of the dark servants having their conversation in the other room before they started to worry about their missing comrades. She slid in said room with a great care not to be spotted, a rather difficult task with some

Werewolves in there, and one, if not the, most dangerous one if her senses were correct.

She waited until they were all away from the table which held the food and drinks and surreptitiously opened her mouth and let the poison leek out of her protruding fangs and into the food. Then, she targeted a pitcher that contained a sweet smelling amber liquid and repeated the process.

She quickly slithered away from the table and waited avidly for all of them to serve themselves.

“I feel my mark burning. I hope our Master is alright. He hasn’t been the same since this Potter brat showed himself.” One of the Death Eaters, Millicent Bulstrode, winced visibly and clutched the marked arm. She received a slap at the back of her head from her once Hogwarts classmate Adrian Pucey, and quite a few glares from the older servants.

“Are you saying you doubt our Lord’s power? Do you want us to be the prey of them?” Pucey whispered harshly to her, his eyes swaying in the others’ direction.

“ You’re right. It was stupid of me.” She tried to erase the nervousness she felt by taking a glass of Butterbeer, inviting the others to do the same. “A TOAST! To Lord Voldemort and to the war he offers us!”

This seemed to lower the tension in the room and they all responded to the call of faithfulness. “Toast! Hogwarts will soon be our Lord’s, and then the world!”

‘Bunch of idiotsss’

Minutes later, twin thumps resonated in the silent room. The adults ran to Millicent and Adrian who lay motionless on the floor. “HEY! Are you okay? Ugh!” Before they could reach the kids, they fell one after the other.

Greyback clutched his chest but was successful in getting his wand. "What the fuck is going on!"

Nagini would have frowned if she had been doted with eyebrows. 'Ssstuborn creature!' She slithered behind the last man standing and tripped him with her tail.

"Shit!" His wand clattered on the floor and rolled away, which gave Nagini the necessary time to attack him. She quickly coiled around him and viciously bit him in his muscled neck.

Greyback choked but grasped Nagini's body and tried to dislodge her by squeezing hard. It hurt Nagini so much she almost let go but instead her tail coiled around his chest in a double attack.

Greyback gasped and struggled wildly, scratching Nagini's thick skin with the help of sharp fingernails; a Werewolf's fingernails. She applied more pressure on the neck and torso, hissing angrily.

"Wh-y?" Greyback wheezed out in agony, a desperate plea to know. "Why is our Master sen-ding his s-snake on us?" His eyes rolled in the back of his head and he finally slumped on the floor, and on Nagini by the same occasion, if it wasn't already enough for her. She pushed him away impatiently and tiredly. 'It'sss finally over, for now.'

With the Werewolf leader finally dead, she relaxed. She was completely extenuated but had one last thing to do: one by one, slowly but surely, she hid them with the others in the dark room and pulled on the doorknob. The Cobra then stopped moving altogether and fell asleep right then and there.

The day passed slowly.

Nobody else came in the deserted room.

Sometime in the night, the house became alive again as the Dark Lord came back from his raid with the members of the Inner Circle. The servants who had stayed bustled around to accommodate their Lord.

A crack resonated in a lonely room of the mansion. Its single occupant didn't move. "Dobby is here! Where is Mister Potter's snake? Ah, there it is! Snake? Dobby is here to...Snake? Why is you ignoring Dobby?" The House-Elf used a bony finger to push the tired reptile gently.

Nagini opened her eyes and hissed faintly, but did not move.

"Mister Potter's snake isn't feeling well? Dobby doesn't know how to care for snakes. Dobby should bring you back to Mister Potter so he can take care of you." The little Elf carefully took hold of Nagini and disappeared with another loud crack.

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My Lord, you must be tired after such a long raid. Why don't you sit down?" Rabastan Lestrangle said in a humble voice.

Red eyes fixed the man a glare. "Do not presssume to tell me what to do, Rabasstan, if you do not wissh to be at the receiving end of my wand."

"Of course m'Lord" was the only hurried and stuttering response the older man got before he decided to sit down.

"Where are the otherss? Why aren't they here to greet me?" Riddle grumbled dangerously. Rabastan and the others in the room with him felt the Dark mark burning in warning.

"I-I will go get them immediately, Master!" Rodolphus Lestrangle's brother bowed as low as he could and ran away.

Riddle sneered and ushered the rest of the Inner Circle away. As lost in his thoughts as he was, he still heard Rabastan come back a while later, shouting out for his Lord. "MASTER! MASTER!"

“Will you sstop sscreaming Lestrangle? You do not want to give me a headache. Do behave like a man of your sstatusss would,” Voldemort drawled tonelessly, his head cocked on one side.

Rabastan threw himself on the floor as a hurried apology. “I apologize, my Lord, but there is an emergency! I found the twenty missing men!”

“Ssso where are they, you idiot?” Tom interrupted impatiently.

“My Lord! They’re- They are dead!”

“WHAT!” Riddle got up so quickly that the chair he was sitting in flew backwards and into a wall, making Rabastan wince pitifully. The older man’s red eyes were blazing in fury and, dare Rabastan think it, perplexity, as if he didn’t know what to make of these news, before he reigned it all in.

The Dark Mark blazed and echoes accompanied Rabastan’s own screams of agony everywhere within the mansion and beyond.

“Who?”

“My-my Lord?”

Voldemort sneered. He was this close from performing Cruciatus on the babbling, incompetent fool.

“The dead oness, you immenssse wasste of my time!” he finally said between clenched teeth.

Rabastan shut his eyes and bowed on his knees until his head touched the ground. He could not bear to feel his Lord’s gaze almost seeping through him. “David Quill, Ludovic Bagman, Augustus Rookwood, Crouch Junior, Jugson,” Rabastan’s voice shook as he spoke the next name “Rodolphus Lestrangle.”

He breathed in deeply, yet his voice still shook. “Nott –both father and son-, Travers, Wilkes, Rita Skeeter, Derrick, Terrence Higgs, Montague, two of the new recruits: Adrian Pucey and Millicent

Bulstrode, Abigail Kent and..." Rabastan trailed off. He could almost feel his Master shaking in pure rage.

The Dark Mark flared to life momentarily.

Tom Marvolo Riddle was not a man who could be easily surprised but the mysterious death of twenty of his Death Eaters, in his OWN MANSION, no less, was bringing him to his limits. Some of them had been at his service for years, the best of the best when it came to executing his orders perfectly. Masterminds in their own right, damnit! He needed them for this war! This was tearing a hole through his plans. How did they die? Who the HELL would dare kill them? Who would be suicidal enough to infiltrate his domain? The image of the Potter boy flashed in his mind briefly but it was almost impossible to believe. Amazingly enough, he didn't carry on with his thoughts of killing Rabastan just to vent some of his anger. His Death Eater rank was decimated enough as it is.

"That'ss sseventeen people, Lestrage." It was not meant to be a question, merely a more than annoyed statement.

The bowing man winced, a thing that did not go unnoticed. "The last three are going to pose a problem, my Lord. Pen, Brahms and...Greyback. The Werewolf community trusted us with them. How can we tell them that two of their best members are dead along with their leader?"

"CRUCIOOOO!"

"ARGHHHHHH!"

Okay, maybe not kill him, but the Cruciatus did help appease his fury, if only momentarily.

Damnit, if he named them Death Eaters it was not so they could die!

"Where and how did they die? Did you find anything or anyone susspiciousss?"

Rabastan was on the verge of unconsciousness when Riddle ended the curse. "N-no," he spoke up with a faint voice. "Salon n-next to the conference r-room. M-Mulciber investigating..." The man fell unconscious after babbling the most important parts his Lord needed to hear.

Tom strode briskly out of the room and swatted his bowing Death eaters aside in the corridor. "Out of my way you imbeciles! Do something useful and tighten the security at once! Malfoy, both of you! Don't just stand there, go with them!"

Lucius and Draco jumped nervously and allowed their pride to be crushed when their Lord dismissed them so easily. Draco watched with rapt attention as Voldemort disappeared down the hallway and turned to his father who was busy giving orders to the others so they wouldn't be punished for disobedience. "Father, what do you think happened? It must be grave if He's that agitated. I've never seen Him so furious before, except when he learned of Potte-"

SLAP!

The younger Malfoy held his now burning cheek with one hand and cowered in front of his father. "You do NOT mention that name here! Have you forgotten what I have thought you, boy? You are but a new recruit here! You do not ask about our Lord's business, it is his alone to know! If he feels magnanimous he might tell us but you do not try to meddle in his affairs! Do you understand?" Lucius whispered harshly to his son, who nodded quickly in response. "Good. Now, take Stone with you and bring Lestrage back to his room. It wouldn't do well for the Dark Lord to see him still lying there when he comes back."

Draco nodded and urged Pierre Stone too follow him. Lucius went back to his work.

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“Sso Mulciber, what iss going on?” Tom walked imperiously in the laboratory and sneered as soon as he saw the twenty bodies lying on the work tables.

Mulciber lifted his head from the many jars of potion. “I’m still analyzing the blood of the victims and everything they ate and drank.”

“Can’t you work any faster? Crucio!”

“ARGHHHHH!”

Tom eyed the bubbling potions littering the table and carelessly ended the curse.

“I-I’m sorry, my Lord! B-but I’m not a Potions Master! These things t-take time! Forgive my slowness!” Mulciber begged while trying to get back to the potions.

Voldemort’s eyes became full of repugnance. “If only that half-blood traitor was still here! Severus Snape, I would kill him right on the spot! I’m one Potions Master short! Mulciber!”

The addressed man jumped and tried to regain his unsteady grip on a bottle full of red liquid when the Dark Lord snapped at him. “Yes my Lord?” he rushed out.

“I want a conclusive report in one hour! No more, no less! If you fail to get me the results I will make sure that your family does not recognize you when I send you home!”

“YesmyLord!” he let out in one breath, bowing as low as he could while Voldemort strode out.

Mulciber let out the breath he’d been holding and winced at every move; the Cruciatus had done quite a number on him.

“The Master was seriously angry. I pity you, Mulciber.”

Said man turned toward one of the Death Eaters who guarded the lab. "I'm an Imperius Specialist, Goyle, not a Potions Master. But since the traitor isn't here someone has to do all the dirty work. I received an Exceed Expectations in Potions, not an Outstanding! I can't work any faster than this and you are not helping! Go back to your post or the Master will have my hide!" he snapped, both out of anger and nervousness.

Goyle, the father of Gregory Goyle, lifted an eyebrow stupidly and went back to guard duty.

Mulciber turned to his work table again, muttering all the while. "Stupid idiot. All muscles but not brains to back them up. What a waste of talent. I don't know how Malfoy can endure Crabbe and Goyle around him all the time. His son's got the same entourage, now that I think of it..."

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"My Lord, we have tightened the security in and out of the mansion, as well as the posts outside Little Hangleton. The outer part of the Forbidden Forest is, unfortunately, inaccessible. Our ward experts told us that Dumbledore has most likely, with the help of the remaining Aurors, strengthened and lengthened the protective and anti-apparition wards around the school. David Hugh was killed when he tried to apparate in the forest and Macnair didn't escape unscathed. Before we gave him a healing and then sleeping potion he said that there were hundreds of spiders looming the area. We think they are Acromantulas, one of many of the half-giant's...pets."

Voldemort processed the information and waved at Lucius to get back to his rank without a word. "Tempus." The time appeared in front of him as soon as he waved his wand.

"MY LORD!"

"Hm, right on time. Not bad, Mulciber."

The man ran in the room, panting and clutching a vial in his hand. "My Lord! I have the results! But I don't think-"

"I did not employ you to think, Mulciber. Now speak! Who is responsible for this carnage?"

Mulciber trembled and knelt on the ground, refusing to look at his Master right in the eyes; he wasn't crazy, he knew what would happen when he told the results to Voldemort. "Master, some of the bodies showed signs of strangulation, as if something had coiled around them tightly, breaking their air supply. I also noticed the bumps and fractured skulls as if something had stricken some of them with something hard. But not all people showed these signs, so I analyzed the victims' blood and the food they consumed. I made the tests many times and it always came out the same. I did not want to believe it but then I checked the bodies and found the necessary proof: bite marks. Both the blood analysis and food analysis showed traces of venom. Snake venom. I apologize for my impudence, my Lord, but the only snake we see everyday around the mansion and shows signs of intelligence is yours."

Tom's eyes widened, and then narrowed into dangerous slits. The magic in the air became tangible. Mulciber wanted to get sick: he could almost taste it and it sickened him. One could only take so much dark magic at the same time. The others kneeling behind him shivered.

The Dark Lord began to hiss long and low. Nothing happened. The Death Eaters were normally in awe of such a talent but now they just wanted to get out of there. The hissing made them feel uncomfortable. VERY uncomfortable.

The hissing soon became loud and clipped, threatening, murderous.

Nothing.

Voldemort's red eyes became almost black.

The Death Eaters, for the first time ever, ran away without being ordered to.

Something was going to happen.

They had to get out of there.

They didn't want to die.

Voldemort either didn't see them run away in his rage or simply didn't care right now.

A dark aura was unleashed.

The room and everything in it disintegrated.

Except for one person, who stood in the middle of the destruction.

“NAGINIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!”

A good fifteen pages, not bad for someone who hasn't written in a couple of months. I hope you don't find the idea of Nagini single-handedly killing twenty Death Eaters a little over the board. The way I see it, she's a cunning “little” thing. Plus she's protected by Harry's magic and is a magical snake. She also got hurt by Greyback: she might be large and measure 8 feet long, snakes are still very sensitive when you squeeze them. And Greyback had the strength in him to do it.

I thank everyone who has been supportive towards my father's situation. I'm greatly pleased to announce that he can now walk without the help of a cane. If you remember, I told everyone that his entire right side had paralyzed after a health problem so you can all imagine how happy I am.

I'm sorry I didn't update sooner but I do worry about my dad even if he's better, plus I have school and a lot of homework, projects and exams right now. I'll have to read my story over again to get back in it but I won't stop it. Please be patient, I love this story to death but I do have a life.

I can't give you an exact date of my next update but I'll try to do it as soon as humanely possible.

I don't want to receive any bad or offensive comments because I didn't update sooner. Some people tend to become nasty in their reviews when I don't show signs of updating. I will not stop the story, so stop worrying for nothing.

REVIEW IF YOU LIKE THE STORY!

DON'T REVIEW IF YOU DON'T! (Yet if you've read it this far I assume you like it!)

'till next time and remember that I love you all!

Eternal Cosmos

Chapter 26: When things finally fall into place

“Do you think he’ll come out soon?”

“No. Not since the weird exuberant House Elf brought his snake back from who knows where. It was in pretty bad shape too. Must’ve been pretty desperate to ask Hagrid for help.”

“I resent that.”

“I just hope she’ll be alright. Harry is very attached to her.”

While Remus decided to stay in Harry’s quarters until the boy found a way to help Nagini get better, Sirius, Alastor, Rosmerta and Hagrid answered the call of yet another Order meeting. Apparently the Dark Lord had started rampaging around again and in greater intensity for no apparent reason. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that Nagini had been hurt but who knew what went on in Harry’s head when he sent his pet away on some unknown errand.

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“Ahh, Sirius! We were waiting for you to begin. Harry is not with you, isn’t he?” Albus Dumbledore asked, looking behind the Animagus and trying to find a mop of unruly black hair, without success.

Sirius shook his head negatively and sat down.

The Headmaster’s office was a little crowded and Fawkes thrilled an annoyed note when Alastor shooed it away to transfigure its perch into a chair. The Phoenix burst away in flames as an obvious means of teleportation, seeking tranquility elsewhere.

“He’s still in his quarters with Remus, trying to find a way to heal his snake. I don’t think he’ll show up anytime soon,” Rosmerta answered in Sirius’ stance while sitting down herself beside McGavin. “Where are Kingsley, Frank and Alice?”

“I decided it was for the best they stay in the Great Hall and teach some defense to the children, following Mr. Potter’s advice. Are you certain he won’t be showing up?” Albus pressed again, looking more than a little miffed that Harry was absent for his first official (in their case anyway) Order of the Phoenix meeting. He plopped a Lemon Drop in his mouth and sagged in his chair slightly when all Sirius did was shrug nonchalantly.

“Albus? Can we start? If Potter doesn’t feel like coming I don’t see why we would have to drag him here,” Snape said with impatience. He was fidgeting in his chair and sometimes gripping his left arm in alarm. “The Dark Lord isn’t taking his sweet time and stopping for tea and biscuits here, you know. We need a plan of action.”

“I know Severus but I was counting on Mister Potter to show up today, especially since Voldemort has started his activity again. I think Harry had something in mind to tip the balance of the war but to make sure I have to talk to him. Sirius, did he tell you anything?”

Sirius’ eyes widened slightly and he shook his head. “Oh no, I’m not going there! I made a promise not to tell anything and I’m not even sure everything worked for him. All I really know is that he asked the Centaurs for help but I don’t know if they said yes or no...though Voldie attacking might have made them change their minds...” he muttered to himself.

Minerva sighed. “I followed Albus’ directions and tried to get into the Room of Requirements earlier today but the door didn’t appear. I don’t think they want us to intrude in their lives.”

The people in the office started to talk at the same time, some badmouthing the Centaurs for not wanting to help. “We accepted them here where it’s safe and they don’t even want to repay us for our generosity-”

“Actually,” Sirius interrupted, throwing the evil eye at Auror Edge, “It’s more Harry who offered hospitality. We simply let him do as he wished. Don’t try to take credit for what my Godson did, Marcus.”

“Shut up, Black. If you hadn’t discovered that this boy was your – precious- Godson you wouldn’t have taken his side so rapidly!” Edge batted his lashes at the word precious and then sneered and hit the table with his fist afterwards in frustration and accusation.

Sirius got up from his chair so fast it tumbled behind him. “What’s that! I’ll let you know I trusted that boy even before we discovered who he truly was! So you can shove anything bad you have to say about him up your-”

“BOYS! SIT DOWN!” Albus interfered brusquely.

Xiomara put Sirius’ chair back up and he mumbled his thanks before sitting down in a huff and not looking at anyone.

“Honestly, Black, can’t you act the least bit mature for five minutes?” Snape drawled even if Dumbledore shot him a warning look from the corner of his eyes.

“Shut up, Snape.”

“Sirius, please... And Severus, could YOU try not to get a rise out of Sirius every five minutes? This is no time for childish rivalry.”

Sirius smirked at Severus who merely turned away from the Animagus.

“Well, we’ll have to start sometimes. Now, I know for a fact that we have the House Elves on our side. They may not look like a force to be reckoned with but they are pretty powerful when they fight someone who is not their master. Elvin Magic is out of our jurisdiction so it’s not easy to deal with; Voldemort’s men will have a great deal of difficulty dispelling their attacks.”

“Albus,” professor Vector interrupted, “what about the Werewolves? Has Remus been able to make a deal with them?”

“Unfortunately no, and that may cause a serious problem. Fenrir Greyback is at the head of their troops and we all know, Remus the first, how bloodthirsty he is...”

If Harry had known that Dobby would come back with a severely injured Nagini maybe he would have thought more carefully about sending her to Riddle Manor before actually doing it. Now he was paying the price: seeing his familiar in this state made him feel twice as guilty as before and the headache he was now sporting made him cranky.

Dobby had immediately gone back to Malfoy's side not to arise suspicion even more and he had put Nagini on his warm bedcovers as soon as he saw what state she was in. He tried to wake her up but nothing worked. He had even begged Hagrid and Poppy to heal the nasty looking claw shaped wounds on her back. The MediWitch did look a little appalled after his request, Harry recalled, and said that she healed humans, not animals. Though, before she went back to the infirmary, she did voice her opinion about the wound looking a lot like Werewolf claw marks, helping Harry and Hagrid find the cause of Nagini's unresponsiveness.

Hagrid had gone to his hut to get some healing salve; it was for magical creatures but they did try it anyway, Harry saying that Nagini had seen and been under her fair share of magic. Apparently it worked to some degree because the wound slowly but surely closed, but Nagini had yet to wake up.

A House Elf tapped on the entry portrait and, since Harry didn't want to give up his place beside his familiar, it was Sirius who answered the door.

“Master Black, sir! Master Dumbledore said that Masters were invited to his office for a meeting!” the House Elf squeaked before disappearing in a puff of smoke.

Sirius closed the door momentarily and looked at everyone inside Harry's quarters. “Looks like we're invited for an Order meeting. I

heard that Voldie was starting to get impatient once again. I think this is the big one, guys. Dumbledore must be sweating right now."

The others nodded and lined up to walk out the door. The Animagus gazed at his unmoving Godson. "You coming Harry?"

The green eyed boy shook his head negatively.

Sirius and Remus shared a look and the Werewolf mouthed 'I'll join you later. I'll stay with him for now.' Sirius nodded and sent him a grateful look before they all walked out, Hagrid bending in half so he could pass without hitting his head on the doorway.

"Remus." The Werewolf startled before stopping at Harry's side. "Do you think Werewolf scratches are fatal to snakes?" He blinked at Hedwig who flew away from the window, probably to go hunt since there was nothing else to do, and turned his attention back to the Cobra.

Remus shrugged. "I really don't know Harry. I'm sorry. But if it can appease your worry, I really don't think so, at least not for a snake Nagini's size. She's strong so she'll get through."

"Thanks Remus."

The man hummed in return. "Do you want something to drink or eat? You haven't had anything since the House Elf brought her back."

Harry shook his head negatively. "No. With my headache I don't think I'll be able to digest anything."

"You have a headache? Why didn't you tell us? Is it because of Him?" he growled.

"Don't worry. I've been plastering my Occlumency walls all over my mind. Something caused Tom to become very angry so the dark mood just seeped through a little. I'm feeling a little queasy but it'll pass. I've been able to block the feeling not too long ago."

Remus didn't look the least reassured. "If you say so...I think I'll get myself something to drink, be right back."

Harry nodded and turned his attention on the sleeping Cobra once again, petting it lightly.

"Masster?"

Harry gasped and bent down to Nagini's level. "Nagini! You're awake! Merlin, I wass sso sscares! What happened to you back there?"

Nagini moved a little but hissed in discomfort; she was still pretty weak. "Do not worry about me, Masster. Nothing a good resst won't cure. I have to admit, though, that the Werewolf did a pretty good number on me."

"Werewolf?" the boy hissed back inquiringly, attention written in his face. "What happened in Riddle Manor?"

"Harry? What's-"

Harry lifted a hand to interrupt him and Remus shut up, surprised that Nagini was awake. He watched with rapt attention as Harry conversed with his second familiar. After a few minutes of intense hissing Nagini quieted down and slithered painfully on Harry's exposed arm, going still as soon as she was completely under his skin.

'Something must be up,' Remus thought, as he gazed at Harry's shocked, and then confident face.

"Let's go Remus!"

"Go? Go where? What's going on Harry?"

"Do you think the meeting is still going on?" Harry continued, completely ignoring Remus' barrage of questions and taking several of his things scattered around the room before walking swiftly out of his quarters.

Remus almost had to run to keep up with the boy. "It must be. Dumbledore made the call only thirty minutes ago." Harry hummed beside him and they continued their trek toward the Headmaster's office.

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"...deal with them?"

"Unfortunately no, and that may cause a serious problem. Fenrir Greyback is at the head of their troops and we all know, Remus the first, how bloodthirsty he is..."

They heard the muffled voices of Vector and Dumbledore in the middle of a conversation on the other side of the old man's door and when Harry opened it enthusiastically every wand in the room pointed at both Remus and he.

"Headmaster!" Harry completely ignored the threat while Remus' hands shot up in the air. "WHOA GUYS! It's just us! Point your wands in some other direction, would you?"

"Well it's not like we were expecting you two to barge in on a meeting like that! Don't do that again!" Mad-Eye barked.

Everyone slowly put their wand away once their fright passed away. "What's going on, Harry? I see Nagini is back on your arm so she must feel better," Sirius greeted his Godson and conjured two chairs for Remus and the younger man to sit on around the table.

"Yes, she woke up not too long ago and went back there to rest, but not before telling me excellent news. Apparently my precious pet has dealt with twenty-six Death Eaters all on her own, dealing a hard blow to Tom's forces. A couple of them were Werewolves so you can guess which one from the two groups managed to scratch her, if you take in consideration that I protected her against magical attacks, not bare-handed ones."

Albus' eyes widened and he clapped his hands together joyously. Finally some good news!"

Snape looked doubtful. "Not that I want to insult your...pet, but how can a snake kill twenty-six humans and Dark Creatures all on her own?"

"I'll let you know that Nagini is very intelligent and capable of thinking ahead. Being around humans helped a lot to make her develop a conscience. She did what a snake does best: slither around, poison, choke and hit, if you count her tail as a weapon. That's how she got rid of them, though she had to double her efforts when it came to the Werewolves."

"Does she know, by any chance, the names of the ones she...disposed of?" Minerva ventured tentatively.

"Not all of them. I'll make a list later of the names she heard being mentioned but there's one I'll mention now..." Harry paused for dramatic effect, making them sweat.

He looked giddy himself and was making the others fidget in their seat.

"The Werewolf leader"

Remus' eyes widened.

"Fenrir Greyback! One nasty piece of work to deal with, too! He's the one who hurt Nagini."

Everyone sagged in their chair and let a collective breath out. Remus still sported a look between surprise, happiness and disbelief.

"My God, Remus! Do you know what this means? The one who bit you..." Sirius trailed.

Remus was too shocked to nod. "Merlin," he finally breathed, "Harry, if Nagini wasn't a snake I'd kiss her."

Snape made a face while the rest of the Order laughed. "This is indeed the best news we could receive in a long time! Tom will have a hard time controlling the Werewolves without Greyback around, especially since he was under His protection," Albus chimed.

"They won't be happy about Greyback being killed in Riddle's territory, I can tell you that," Harry seconded with a smirk.

"And what about the Centaurs? Will they fight with us?" Professor Sprout asked curiously.

"Hm, I still have to talk to them about that but I think some of them will side with us. Voldemort's stunt with the Dementors made them pretty angry at him since the soul-suckers killed their elder. And what about you? Have you been able to rally some allies?" Harry asked the Headmaster.

"Aside from the hundreds of Wizards in Hogwarts and possibly the children? The House Elves are ready to support us and Bill and Charlie Weasley have been able to convince the Goblins of Gringotts to lend us one of their dragons, which is no small feat."

Molly and Arthur looked at their sons proudly while said men blushed slightly under the praise. "We'll do anything to help, right, Bill?"

"Yeah! You can count on us."

"Speaking of House Elves, Harry, who was the one that brought Nagini back?"

The green eyed boy smirked. "He's my spy inside Voldie's territory. Actually I also knew him in my old world. Dobby is Malfoy's servant but don't go badmouthing him! He hates Malfoy to death. The only thing keeping him there is the contract between servant and master. Picture Sirius' relation with Kreacher and you'll be able to see the general idea."

Sirius shuddered at the name of his mother's detestable House Elf.

“Sure, he’s a little exuberant but he’s damn loyal to people he cares about.” Harry’s eyes clouded over as he thought about his Dobby’s heroic accomplishments as well as his enthusiasm each time he went into the kitchen to visit him or give him a gift. He was tiring but oh so lovable nonetheless.

Sirius and Remus shared a knowing look and the golden eyed man put a comforting hand on Harry’s back. The others, who didn’t know of Harry’s detailed past, simply looked on questioningly with the feeling of being powerless in the matter.

Rosmerta and Xiomara also gazed at each other shortly before they both smiled softly. “I’m certain he was a great friend. He must still be here,” Rosmerta spoke softly, the flying instructor nodding her assent.

Harry blinked slowly and looked at them both, sending them their smile back. “Yeah, he was great...and he still is. I’m happy I got to know him too in this world.” He just didn’t mention the fact that Dobby almost killed him a couple of times in his second year. Dobby’s protectiveness bordered the limits of obsession and probably insanity, though he would never say it out loud.

“Keh, I think I’ll go see the Centaurs, I’ll see you guys later.”

“H-Harry? Wait!” Sirius called out, but the boy was already out the door.

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Luckily for Harry, the door of the Room of Requirement immediately opened for him. Only a few of the Council members were there to greet him, though, the rest of the five clans hiding in the lush forest.

“Ah, Harry. We were beginning to wonder when you would come to us,” Firenze spoke up, the rest finally paying attention to him instead of talking quietly to each other.

“Yes, I apologize for my lateness but Nagini was hurt yesterday and she was in need of medical attention.”

“I see. I hope the one who hurt her is now suffering the price.”

“Oh, he’s dead all right.”

The Centaur nodded. “We were waiting for you to know what to do. We cannot possibly win this war alone. We are resistant to most magic but I fear that these Dementors will be the death of us if they gang up on us like they did the last time. We are still mourning the loss of Master Heracles,” Firenze spoke softly.

Bane’s hoofs hit the ground in a show of anger. “Tell us what to do and we will make Him pay! The Centaur forces are at your disposition!” he barked while the others nodded confidently, faces set in stone. The tension could be easily felt. They were ready to fight to the death to avenge their Leader.

“I’m honored that you decided to join forces with us but not to sound rude of anything...Bane, I never pictured you as the type to join a human’s side so quickly.”

Bane snorted. “In my eyes you are the only worthy human to fight side by side with. So it’s only natural that Firenze will be the one to continue the negotiations with the old man, being the only one who can tolerate him to a certain degree. We will continue to train and train the children old enough for this war. The females who are not expecting will also help.”

“Alright, if that is what you wish. One last thing: do you know how Aragog is doing?”

Stratos, the leader of the blue clan, was the one who answered. “He was fairing well last time I heard of him. He and the rest of his family were actually enjoying a nice...dinner.”

Harry snorted but his eyes held some malicious mirth. “Hmmm, Death Eater à la crème. A nice choice on the menu.”

The leaders decided not to comment on his cruel sense of humor.

“Would it be best if I join you now? There is no time to spare if you want us to help you we have to talk things through,” Firenze spoke up, taking a few steps in Harry’s direction.

“Of course. Let us be on our way, then.”

“Wait,” Alta spoke up, “take Orion with you. He seems to be taken with you, young human. Perhaps, if he goes with you, he will restrain himself from spying on a private meeting next time?” The blond tribe leader questioned seemingly out of the blue, yet his gaze was straying toward the forest. He smirked when a flushed Orion walked out. “Sorry.”

Firenze actually chuckled. “There is no need to apologize. But let your curiosity remain as it is, not turn into an obsession. Come, young Orion.”

“Thank you for this privilege, Master Firenze. I will try my best not to be a bother.” The blond Centaur trotted towards Harry and smiled eagerly.

Harry shook his head but his eyes held some mirth at his friend’s enthusiasm. “You won’t be a bother. Just be careful and stay near us; some wizards, even from the Light side, still have some difficulty accepting human and non-human relations and treaties. They may not attack you directly but you will recognize the signs by their body language.”

“I understand. I am still wary of the human race. Do not misinterpret my eagerness. I only want to see how a war is prepared and...um...actually, I kind of admire you.”

Harry blinked and reddened, but did not boast.

“You’re still so young but you can obtain someone’s trust so easily. I was surprised and more than a little skeptical when I heard that a

human had asked for a Council mobilization but when I saw you walking beside Master Firenze, like an equal, no less...”

“I understand Orion. I’m honored to have won your trust and friendship. Friends and family are very precious to me,” the green eyed boy said quietly.

Orion’s lips quirked up and he thrust his hand in front of Harry. “Then let us shake hands, my friend! Let’s win this war together!”

Harry nodded confidently and smirked. “Yeah, we’ll win this!”

Unbeknownst to the two males shaking hand, the group of elders smiled and nodded to each other. “This is the beginning of a great alliance,” Bane spoke up softly, “things are looking up. We have the hope and passion of the future generation on our side.”

Hi everyone! FINALLY, I’ve been able to write the 26th chapter of WWM. I’m very sorry for the delay but at the moment school is more important than fan fiction, since this is my last semester. I have projects to give for all of my art classes and the final one will be held during 5 weeks, so you can see I am not to blame for my lack of updates. It’s a miracle (thank my week off) that I’ve been able to piece a chapter together in just a few days.

I know some people (though I really hope not) will probably write a review with something like “What took you so f\$cking long to update?” PLEASE, I DON’T WANT TO RECEIVE SUCH REVIEWS. If you don’t have anything good to say, don’t say it. It’s not in my intention to be mean by saying that, but I don’t much care for insensitive replies or flames (though I did not receive those very often, they are very disagreeable). I’m doing my best here for you guys, so I appreciate those who have constructive criticism or nice things to say. I do have a life outside but you guys will always be one of my top priorities. I never abandoned a fanfic before, never did, never will. Have some faith in me. I’ll finish the story for my great readers!

‘Till next time, hopefully sooner than 2-3 months, but remember that CEGEP right now is being a b\$tch. THANK YOU!

Eternal Cosmos

-Hugs n’ kisses to all!-

Chapter 27: Orion's visit

The trek to the Great Hall was made in silence; Orion was too busy staring at everything around him and the students they passed in the corridors were busy staring at Orion, who didn't seem to notice them or care.

Harry kept to himself while thinking about a plan of action that would ensure their victory. His feet lead them automatically to the Great Hall and Orion nudged Harry when they stopped in front of the doors.

"So, what now?"

They could hear voices on the other side, probably students practicing their spell work.

"We hope that everything goes well. Just stay beside me if you don't feel comfortable in the presence of so many humans."

Orion nodded in understanding and Harry pushed the heavy doors open. Hundreds or so of heads swivelled in their direction in curiosity until the teachers and Aurors present called the kids' attention back to their duty. Some adults stiffened at the sight of the Centaur walking in the room beside Harry as would an equal but no aggressive behaviour was noted other than blatant disregard of the magical creature.

'Better that than name calling...' Harry deadpanned. 'Dumbledore must have told them about the Centaurs being present in the castle.'

Ron and Hermione waved at Harry, as well as Colin and his friends but their attention was called back stiffly by Severus who was, to his great misfortune, trying to teach them the Patronus Charm...without success, it seemed.

"Hey Harry!" The green eyed boy and Orion turned towards Sirius who waved for them to come near the teachers' table.

Harry dared a small wave of hand towards the suffering Gryffindors under Snape's tutelage and made his way to his Godfather who was flanked by Remus, as always. "Hi again Sirius, Remus. What are you two doing here? Is the reunion over already?"

"Yes. Since we were almost certain that you would show up here we decided to wait for you in the Great Hall," the Werewolf answered softly.

Harry smiled. "Guys, I want you to meet my friend Orion. He was very curious about the castle and the preparations so his Leader gave him the permission to accompany me...after being caught spying on a private conversation between the Leaders and I," the boy added with a playful smirk.

The Centaur's cheeks coloured imperceptibly and he swatted Harry on the back as payback.

"Hey! Orion, this is my friend...you could call him my uncle or something but I think we're closer than that, Remus Lupin, a Werewolf, and this is Sirius Black, my Godfather. You remember my Patronuses?"

Orion nodded.

"Well, the Werewolf form is Moony, or Remus, and the dog form is Sirius when he transforms into his Animagus form. The stag is... was my father's Animagus form when he was still alive, also my first Patronus form. I gained the two others sometime upon my arrival here."

Orion inclined his head slightly in respect when he felt no bad intentions coming from them. Remus offered his hand and the blond Centaur looked at Harry before awkwardly shaking it back in greeting.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Orion."

“Um, thank you, Mr. Lupin. I must say I am having some difficulty adapting to the many differences in cultures but Harry here is being most helpful. So thank you for taking care of him.”

“You can call me Remus, Orion. I may be a Werewolf but I don’t bite.”

“Not unless it’s a Full Moon,” Sirius muttered under his breath, which owed him an elbow jab in the ribs from said Werewolf.

“Behave!” The golden eyed man hissed before smiling once again at the Centaur. “And of course we’re taking care of Harry now. He’s like a son to us both.”

This comment touched Harry deeply but he stayed silent, watching the interaction between some of the most important people to him.

“Oh, I do not mind at all that you are a Werewolf. We Centaurs are not as biased as humans can be on these matters. But thank you for the name permission, though.”

Sirius rolled his eyes at the way-too-formal greeting and slapped Orion on the back with vigour, making the half-beast’s eyes widen and sputter in shock and surprise, completely forgetting about the usual impassive Centaur composure.

“Hello Orion! It’s nice to meet a good friend of Harry’s! You can call me Sirius!”

Remus slapped his hand on his face while muttering “only Sirius can do these kind of things” under his breath.

Harry was too busy trying to keep his laughter in to hear Remus.

“Ah...Hello...Sirius.” Orion offered a tentative smile back to the Animagus and Harry laughed before he asked Orion to follow him.

“Don’t mind them, and especially don’t mind Sirius. They’re the closest people to me, and the dearest. Sirius can be a little exuberant at times but he’s a person in whom I have the utmost confidence in.”

Orion glanced back towards Sirius who kept himself busy with Remus.

“It’s good to know.”

“NO! NO! NO! You dunderheads! Not like that! Why was I burdened with the job of teaching you this complex spell?...”

Harry’s attention deviated to an exasperated Potions Master who, after the outburst, kept muttering to himself. “Is there a problem, Professor?” the Boy-Who-Lived asked out of curiosity.

Snape harrumphed and turned around. “No. Mind your own business, Potter.”

Harry blinked, not looking the least bit offended. “Oh. I just wanted to help. Now’s not the time to be difficult and remember petty rivalry, Professor. Must I make you remember that I am in no way my father?”

“ALRIGHT! Alright! Do whatever you like but leave me alone!” Snape turned around once again and concentrated his thoughts elsewhere, not once deigning Orion with some kind of welcoming gesture.

“How rude...” the aforementioned Centaur muttered darkly, glaring at the pale man’s back, itching to use the sword strapped against his side.

“Don’t mind him, he’s always like that,” Harry whispered to his four legged friend.

“Hey Harry!” Hermione called out, motioning for him to join their group. Ron was still giving Snape a distrustful look.

“Hi everyone. Was Snape giving you a hard time?”

“-When

-Is he

-not?” the Weasley twins grumbled together.

“Like they said!” Colin pointed to Fred and George. “He was trying to teach us the Patronus Charm but everyone knows it’s an Auror level spell. They can’t really expect us to be able to do it! Not even Hermione can do it!” the blonde boy exclaimed in frustration.

But the last comment earned him a hit on the head courtesy of a pissed off Hermione. “Don’t rub that fact in, would you?”

Dean and Seamus tried to keep their chortle to a minimum decibel level and rasped their throat when the Ravenclaw girl shot them a warning look.

“It isn’t because the adults told you it was a higher level spell that you can give up so easily,” Orion said wisely while putting a hand on Harry’s shoulder, silently seeking comfort because he did not know what impact his words would have on the humans.

The kids gave him a wide berth and eyed him warily, if also a little with awe. Harry was certain Luna Lovegood was eyeing the Centaur with dreamy eyes from her group with McGonagall and chuckled at the thought. “This is my friend Orion, you mustn’t be afraid of him.”

The others gave him sceptical looks but nodded slowly. Years upon years of having to hear Dumbledore’s speech during the sorting ceremony, saying to all that everything that resided in the Forbidden Forest was dark and dangerous had taken roots their minds but they were giving Harry the benefit of the doubt.

“You know, Orion’s right. I don’t think Severus is a patient enough teacher for this particular spell but I was able to master it during my third year with Professor Lupin’s help.”

“THIRD YEAR!” most of them gaped.

Hermione gave him a slightly jealous gaze but sighed, knowing and admitting that Harry had a special talent in that area. “Professor Lupin in third year? But you weren’t here with us in third year...”

“It’s a long story, forget about it. To come back to the matter at hand, you just have to concentrate on your happiest memory, not just a random one.”

“That’s easy for you to say! You’re not the one who’s being taught by Snape! Have you ever tried concentrating on a happy memory while looking at the guy?” Ron asked bitterly.

Harry chuckled and gazed at Snape purposefully. “Expecto Patronum,” he murmured. A light shone from the tip of his wand and Prongs formed at once. The animal looked around, and then at his creator before bowing towards Harry and disappearing, sensing no immediate danger.

Snape sniffed in disdain before walking away.

“Whoa!” Denis Creevey exclaimed in awe, “it was way less translucent than Professor Snape’s Patronus!”

“Snape has a Patronus? I’ve never seen it,” Harry mentioned.

“It’s a raven,” Hermione stated at once.

“A creepy animal for a creepy man with a creepy personality,” Fred, or was it George? added with a shudder.

Harry shook his head at their antics. “And there I thought he would have something like a bat as a Patronus, what with the way he sweeps upon unsuspecting students out after curfew...”

Some giggled.

“Anyway, regardless of Severus’ personality, I’m sure you can think of something happier.”

Hermione hummed and furrowed her brow in concentration, pointing her wand in front of her. “EXPECTO PATRONUM!” Her wand sputtered some white mist as if choking but did nothing else.

“Well, it reacted more this time than with Snape, that’s a start,” Ron offered but recoiled when his girlfriend sent him a glare.

“Relax Hermione. You’re trying too much. Don’t force the words out, just concentrate on a happy feeling,” the green eyed boy explained.

Hermione huffed but closed her eyes, her brow still furrowed slightly. “Expecto Patronum!”

A wisp of silver mist floated around Hermione’s wand tip before disappearing.

“That’s better, see?”

“But it still has no shape whatsoever! It was just a little mist!” the frustrated girl exclaimed.

“Have patience, which memory are you using, if it’s not impolite to ask.”

She gave Harry a questioning look but answered nonetheless. “My first day at Hogwarts.”

“Ah.” Harry chuckled. “Basic, every-wizard-happy-memory.”

The girl shot him an irate glare.

“Don’t worry. I used this memory too at first, I admit. Try harder with a different memory.”

Hermione understood and nodded, setting up to work with Ginny Weasley at her side, the youngest trying to understand the complex spell.

“What is YOUR happiest memory, mate?” Bill Weasley asked, coming up from behind a startled Harry and Orion. “Sorry, I couldn’t help but to listen to your conversation. I already know how to do the spell, even if it’s not as opaque as your own.”

Harry seemed to debate whether he should answer the Curse-Breaker or not. “...When I saw Sirius and Remus here for the first time...”

‘When I realized that I finally had the chance to have a family to call my own...’ he finished inwardly.

The atmosphere grew solemn. Bill patted Harry’s back in some resemblance of understanding before going back to Charlie and the ever suspicious looking Mundungus Fletcher.

“Well then I guess all we have to do now is work on it,” Ron said reluctantly.

They went back to work when Harry noticed some agitation amongst the adults. He ushered the Gryffindors to continue working and marched back to Sirius’ side. “What’s going on?” he whispered to his Godfather.

The older man pulled Harry with him towards Dumbledore’s group and Orion followed silently. The group, minus Dumbledore, hurried out of the Great Hall and out of the castle and stopped outside the castle’s wards. “Diagon Alley is under attack. We think Voldemort is trying to get into Gringotts. Everybody knows what he has to do? Good. Grab onto the Portkey, it’ll bring us to the entrance,” Moody grunted in hurry.

Harry grabbed the old broomstick and glanced at his side at the nervous Centaur. “Moody! Does this work for Centaurs?” he rushed out.

The old Auror only had the time to say “huh?” before Harry acted on impulse: he grabbed Orion’s hand and made him touch the broom at the last second. The Centaur let a loud yelp of fright escape his throat as they were all catapulted away.

Their landing was even less dignified: while most of the adults landed without trouble, Orion and Harry, who hadn’t been prepared, fell in a heap on the ground. “I hate Portkeys,” the green eyed boy deadpanned while slowly getting up.

Orion was still gasping but was able to get up after much fumbling. “What was that!”

“It was a Portkey: it enables a person to be transported to another intended destination.”

‘Or non-intended if you count my fourth year...’ Bad memories sprouted in his mind.

Moody stomped to them. Orion put his hand on the hilt of his sword warily.

“Potter! What were you thinking!” he hissed. “Nobody tested Portkeys with Centaurs before!”

Orion’s eyes widened and he swatted Harry on the shoulder when said boy only shrugged. “Well now we know that it works.”

Alastor was about to open his mouth again but Kingsley shook his head and motioned towards the middle of the street. They hid quickly. “Death Eaters!” Bill whispered venomously.

Wands were drawn out.

“And Dementors aren’t far,” Harry added darkly while clutching his head after reducing his mental shield. “We may not see them but I feel them. They’re coming.”

His mother's faint screams were immediately muffled when he used his Occlumency but he kept his wand at the ready. It could only do so much to block the mind against Dementors.

"What should we do?" Arthur asked with a slight tremor in his voice. "With Albus staying at Hogwarts I fear we won't have enough power to make them retreat."

Sirius snorted rudely, earning himself a glare from Remus. "We have Harry with us and we're not to be underestimated either. And who ever said we wanted to make them retreat? We don't push away: we make prisoners and we get rid of them, that's all. The less we have to deal with the less the people at Hogwarts will have to deal with them."

"That's all good but what do we do now?"

Moody stayed quiet and grumbled to himself before he gazed at Harry reluctantly. "Potter, is your snake able to spy?"

Harry stared at him with an are-you-kidding-me? look.

Moody waved his hand. "Not like that, Potter! I'm just asking if it's well enough to spy after what happened to it."

"SHE should be able to do the job, as long as it's not life threatening."

The man grumbled, not wanting to admit that he actually needed the snake's help. "I want...her to look how many Death Eaters there are so we can evaluate our forces and decide on a strategy."

Harry looked at him strangely. "But can't your eye see more?"

"Not with all those fires and this black smoke around."

Harry looked around. Truly, Diagon Alley had seen better days.

The Death Eaters had destroyed a lot of shops and put fire to them. Since this is a magical world, magical items that caught on fire started

to emit thick black magical flames. Harry knew that some of those items had even exploded because, from what he could see, the broom shop had no more front side. He dared not think about the potions shop or what would have happened if Ollivander had left the wands in his shop.

Luckily everyone had evacuated Diagon Alley but the Death Eaters surely were going to have some fun in the darkest parts of the place...

After taking a good look at the place he extended his arm and murmured in Parseltongue. The mark on his left arm flared to life and Nagini slowly slithered down his arm. She let Harry reduce her size considerably while listening to what she had to do. "Are you certain you are alright?"

"Of coursse. It won't take long jussst wait here."

It took some minutes before Nagini came back, unharmed. She relayed the information to Harry, who relayed it to the group. The boy nullified the shrinking spell on his familiar and she went back to her usual resting place, though ready to spring to life if need be.

"Everyone knows what to do? Let's go!"

Finally an update! (Even if it's a cliffhanger...) I could have made the chapter longer but I wanted to get something out as quickly as possible. I hope this satisfies you. I promise I won't take as long for the next update. School is finished so I won't have this in the way (only my job now). And I already know what to write in the next chapter, for the most parts.

I really hope you've liked and we'll see each other in the next chapter! Thanks you for all staying with me for so long!

(I really love you guys!)

Eternal Cosmos

Chapter 28: Beneath and Black Creatures

They advanced with stealth, slowly gaining terrain and getting near their goal. According to Nagini, a group of twenty or so Death Eaters was holding their position in front of Gringotts but didn't make any more moves to get in.

This baffled some people of Moody's group but Harry knew quite well that Gringotts' defenses weren't to be taken lightly. The sign at the entrance wasn't there for nothing and the Goblins had surely barricaded the doors with their own magic.

The green eyed boy frowned when they stopped advancing, far enough not to be seen but close enough to attack with precise effectiveness. Orion hid behind a partially destroyed and still fuming wall.

"What are they waiting for?" Charlie murmured inquisitively, narrowing his eyes at the sight of the stalling Death Eaters.

Moody was about to order them to move out and attack while they were distracted when Voldemort's servants became deathly still and quiet. A visible tension was felt and Harry thought for a moment that they had been discovered but it became clear that the silence had more something to do with respect and deference than hatred.

"Shit, who are they?" Kingsley mumbled in distress. "This is getting out of hand!"

Surely, another yet smaller group of cloaked men appeared seemingly out of nowhere and joined the Death Eaters; it didn't look like they wanted to interact with the servants too much and stayed a couple of meters away, almost blending in the shadows.

The day was beginning to fade away, painting the sky a bright crimson color. Blood red. They were so covered up that Harry couldn't even see their faces. They were entirely clothed from head, to fingers, to toe. Nobody spoke up out of the two groups. They seemed to be waiting for something in eager edginess.

“What are they waiting for?” Remus echoed Charlie’s previous murmur. The man’s fingers were slowly stroking the wand he held in a protective grip out of nervousness.

“Something is wrong with this new group,” Orion muttered to Harry, giving his friend a worried look at the same time. He was itching to paw the ground in what? Eagerness to fight? Fright? He didn’t know, but one thing he knew: that new group was going to be troublesome.

“What makes you say that?” Harry asked, trying to take a better look at the new arrival but once again failing.

“I do not know exactly but my senses are tingling. I don’t feel anything from them and when I say nothing, I mean nothing. No feeling, no hatred, nothing. An enemy is easier to deal with when you can feel him coming and predict his moves but them...I really don’t know,” the Centaur finished lamely in an even softer whisper, disappointed that he could not be of any more help. He was afraid to be overheard somehow and Moody’s group didn’t take it lightly: a Centaur just didn’t get scared for nothing.

To put it bluntly they were all thinking about going back to Hogwarts, the hell with this mission, but leaving Gringotts to its fate was out of the question even if they weren’t a hundred percent certain that the Death Eaters were going to be able to get in the bank in the first place.

Out of a sudden the Death Eaters all started to bombard the giant doors of the Wizarding bank. The spells all deflected from the door and got sent back to their original casters, whom quickly jumped out of the way.

The second group stayed in their original position so Harry assumed they were there only if something went wrong. The Death Eaters formed a tight group again and started to chant something softly, all pointing their wands together.

Harry and the rest stiffened. "We have to act now! This is Ancient Magic, Voldemort must've taught it to them!"

Moody was still looking indecisive but it was a stressed out Tonks that shook him out of his stupor. "Damnit Mad-Eye! Let's go now! Once they're inside it'll be harder to deal with them!"

At once they charged but unfortunately the doors of Gringotts were blasted open before they could reach the enemy. The Death Eaters didn't even look back at the group of Aurors and rushed in, a behavior that puzzled the light side's group greatly.

That is until the second, smaller formation blocked the entry and hissed at them before charging at a rapid speed.

Remus' golden eyes widened and then narrowed considerably before he snarled loudly. "VAMPIRES!"

Sirius held his breath and prepared to fight. The others did the same and soon curses were being thrown in every direction.

The Vampires were damn hard to bring down; each time Harry was about to hit one he just evaporated and reappeared elsewhere, hissing menacingly.

Remus, with his inhuman strength, managed to bring two down single handedly and kill them with an errand piece of wood.

Harry couldn't feel prouder of the man, and he was impressed that Remus could actually show such a feral side while still being human. His strength was probably fueled by the hatred Werewolves held towards Vampires; either way the green eyed boy was relieved that Remus was on his side.

A moment of inattention brought him at the mercy of one of the enemy. The black haired Vampire was about to sink his sharp canines in Harry's neck when the bloodsucker was roughly pushed aside and almost left his face print on the ground when Orion stomped on him in a mad dash.

The Centaur got on his two hind legs and brandished his sword angrily. "Go away, Vampires! You are not welcome here! Our problem lies with the Death Eaters, not your tribe! Let us pass or feel the consequences!"

Harry couldn't be more thankful to have Orion with him today and Remus and Sirius let out the breath they'd been holding.

While they were distracted, Harry motioned for Charlie to come with him towards Gringotts. After a quick nod to the group and a mouthed 'We'll join you later' from Sirius, Harry and Charlie quickly made their way inside the bank.

They vaguely heard the battle restarting and Charlie was about to go back when Harry quickly caught his arm and propelled the older redhead forward. "Harry! They're Vampires! We can't let them fight these monsters alone!"

"I have faith in them and in Orion not to get bitten. Right now we have to access the Pillar of Gringotts before the Death Eaters get their hands on it! I'll need you to help repel them, that's why I chose you to come with me," Harry whispered softly, stopping at each corner to make sure they weren't being overheard or spied upon.

"Me!" Charlie gave the boy a look of incredulity before he tuned his voice down after a warning gaze from Harry. "Why the heck do you need me for!" the redhead whispered, aghast.

Harry grunted and moved forward again, dodging a Goblin protection spell from his left. "Goddammit, Charlie! What do you think is Gringotts' number one protection!"

"Oh...OH!"

Harry rolled his eyes. "Yes, oh indeed. Now come, quickly!"

After a few twists and turns down several nearly unused stairs, Harry let out a muffled curse and hid behind a corner. Charlie's eyes widened and he followed Harry. A long corridor leading to a gigantic

set of doors, even greater than Hogwarts', was now partially hidden from their view. Hundreds of Goblins were sprawled on the ground and there was so much red liquid on the floor that Harry couldn't know for sure if they had all perished.

"Fuck," Harry whispered, "Voldemort must have showed them a dark ritual or two to destroy the Goblins' wards. That's really powerful magic."

Charlie didn't berate Harry for his language; after all, the situation truly was critical. If Gringotts possessions and magic fell into Tom's hands there was no telling how much the wizarding world would have to suffer because this would immensely tip the balance Harry had carefully created over the passing months he had spent in his new world.

Luckily, the last set of doors was even more warded than anything else and would not budge against the renewed assaults of the Death Eaters, who were apparently growing more and more frustrated over each failed attempt.

Making sure that they would not succeed, at least for the next ten minutes or so, Harry stirred his redheaded friend towards another corridor. This one, however, held no protection whatsoever and the stairs seemed to lead to an even darker and unexplored part of the building, near the very foundations of the building.

"Lumos! Ignis!" A ball of light lit up above Harry's wand, enabling them to see better, and then Harry used a small fire spell to burn all the spider webs blocking the way. "Come on Charlie, we're almost there. You'll have to do most of this alone; I don't think I can handle this by myself."

Charlie nodded, ready for the task Harry had set upon him. He leveled his wand when they arrived in front of another gigantic set of doors. The doors looked very ancient and surprisingly made of thick muggle metal, though rusty, but Harry knew by the complicated runes etched on them that they would hold anything down.

“Why hasn’t it opened when the Goblins were attacked? It was supposed to do so in order to protect Gringotts as a last resort,” Charlie muttered.

Harry shrugged, also pointing his wand towards the door. “Voldemort is privy to all sorts of information. He probably thought of a way to bypass the wards responsible for opening the doors and transmitted the information to his servants. Either way we can’t be thinking about that now, our time is almost up. My wand is vibrating; there’s strong dark magic at hand upstairs. We have to open this door. Are you ready? This could be dangerous since it isn’t the triggered wards that will open the doors.”

Charlie nodded, his lips tightly pressed together. “Yes, do it.”

Harry concentrated on the door and started to chant under his breath. The double set of doors shook dangerously, the protection spell sizzled, and a great roar made the floor tremble in warning.

Charlie dared a look towards Harry; the younger boy had closed his eyes and a look of utter concentration was etched on his face. His wand was glowing fiercely and when Harry uttered the last syllables of the enchantment the protection spell broke free under the tremendous magic assault of the boy’s wand.

The door opened slowly and about mid-way clanged open to make way for a gigantic clawed and scaly paw. The roar that followed was so deafening that Harry and Charlie ducked aside and created a protection bubble around their bodies.

Thick smoke slowly filled the place as the rest of the body belonging to the scaly leg finally stomped through the rest of the doorway. “Humanssss.....danger.....freeeeeeee.....kill.....”

Harry’s eyes widened as he understood bits and pieces of what the dangerous magical beast was saying. ‘But why didn’t I understand the Hungarian Horntail in my fourth year? Is it because of the increase in my magical abilities?...Possible...But I can’t seem to understand it completely...Probably because it’s only partly in the reptilian family...’

He didn't have more time to ponder on the possibilities, though, when Charlie began to do his job. With a well aimed spell Harry didn't recognize Charlie slowly subdued the Dragon in front of them. Of course Charlie knew these spells; his job was to work with Dragons, to capture and subdue them.

This one was probably more tamed and trained than the wild ones, though, because only one person normally stood no chance whatsoever after shooting some spell over a Dragon.

"That's good," Charlie murmured, making sure he didn't make any sudden movements to rile up the animal more than it probably already was, "it recognizes me as one of its caretakers. But it looks shaken up, as if it doesn't know what to do since the alert hasn't been triggered and it was forced out. I can't maintain this spell forever and it'll go on a rampage if I let it free. It will only listen to Goblin language, I can't speak that!" the redhead whispered, lost as to how to act.

Harry winced. "Let me try something. I don't know if it'll help or worsen things though, but it's better than nothing. Dragon, lisssten to me!"

Charlie jumped slightly when Harry started to speak in Parseltongue. The Dragon quickly turned its head towards Harry and smoke flew out when it opened its jaws to growl at Harry menacingly.

"Are you certain of what you're doing?" Charlie asked nervously; sweat was starting to pour down his forehead.

"No. But I understood it partially when it came out so my guess is that it can also partially understand me. Here goes nothing. There are Death Eaterssss near the treassssury, Gringottssss isss under attack and the Goblinssss and their defenssssessss have been pierced. You have to deal with them before it'sss too late!"

The Dragon probably mistook what Harry said because it roared greatly and tried to chomp Harry down with a quick snap of its jaws. It was unsuccessful, though, because Harry rolled out of the way after

shoving Charlie aside. It was about to attack again when Nagini suddenly uncoiled from Harry's arm and hissed a warning.

This triggered another hissing fit from somewhere around the room, but this kind of low and dangerous hiss made even Charlie pale in fright. He turned his head around frantically searching for the unknown source of the sound and started to panic when he saw nothing out of the ordinary.

But the hissing grew louder and the Dragon actually recoiled and calmed down, showing no more sign of wanting to attack Harry.

Said boy's eyebrow twitched at some tone of hissing or another but did not talk in Parseltongue again; he merely pointed towards the staircase in a commanding gesture and the Dragon roared and literally flew in the Death Eaters' direction.

"What the Hell happened!" Charlie's legs stopped supporting him and he fell on his knees.

Harry didn't say anything. He merely chuckled at his familiar still hissing and spitting dangerously around his arm and put his hand on Nagini's head to calm her. "Sssuch language, dear. It isss not becoming from sssomeone of your ssstature. But I do appreciate the thought."

"I abhor Dragonsss. Great beassstsss they are, I admit, but hybridsss who do not even fully undersstand the noble sssnake-tongue. Sssavagesss! Primitivesss! Ancient beingsss with no more brain than a peacock!"

The rest of her hissing fit was muffled by a chuckling Harry who put his hand more securely around her muzzle, ignoring Charlie's creeped out look.

Their attention was brought back by another roar and screams of terror coming from the chamber upstairs. Nagini held tight as Harry and Charlie both sprung into action and ran towards the sounds, wands at the ready.

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Sirius cursed out loud, figuratively and literally, as a Vampire breezed past him. Forgetting about his wand for a moment he hit the Vampire with his bare fist, which earned him a vicious screech in return and a swipe of claw in his direction. Black hissed as the claws reached his arm and he momentarily transformed into his grim-like dog counterpart to sink his sharp teeth into the Vampire's leg.

The dark creature screeched again and punched him so hard he let out a high-pitched whine and almost flew back a couple of meters. "Damn!" Sirius cursed when he transformed back, holding his throbbing ribs. "I think the Thing broke something," he wheezed out, blood gently trickling down his mouth to the ground.

Remus ran to him quickly and performed the Cruciatus on the creature but it evaded the spell before it hit its mark. The Werewolf snarled angrily and knelt protectively over his wounded friend. "Can you get up Sirius?"

Sirius tried to move but grunted in response. "Sorry Remus. Who would've thought that so few Vampires could be such a pain in the ass?" the Animagus tried to alleviate the atmosphere and laughed weakly, and then winced and wrapped his arm around his ribcage area.

They were not paying attention to their surroundings and he startled when Remus was viciously pulled out of Sirius' way and thrown aside. The Vampire hissed in disgust at the Werewolf and Sirius cried out when the creature descended upon Remus' jugular, clearly intending on killing his best friend.

"Remus! Goddammit!" the Animagus tried to move and point his wand in the Vampire's direction but another flew by and nearly punched Sirius on the face, if it wasn't for Tonks who hit the creature with a powerful stunner that flew mere millimeters past Sirius' nose and into the Vampire.

Unfortunately it didn't do a thing to it, if only anger it more.

Sirius threw a dark look to his cousin, who shrugged her shoulders.

"Damnit Nymphadora! You could have hit me with that!" Sirius wheezed out with a glare, eyes narrowing in pain and disgust when more blood flowed through his parted lips.

"Well SoOrRy!"

"UGH! GUYS! Little help here!"

The arguing cousins' attention snapped back to poor Remus who was still on the ground, his hands tightly wrapped around the Vampire's wrists to prevent a mortal bite. He snarled but was unable to fend it off and was scratched on the cheeks in an attempt to throw it off.

Not two seconds later a sword impaled the dark creature and it immediately let go of Remus in order to nurse its bleeding stomach wound. Remus hastily got off the ground and rejoined Sirius, helping him get up and acting as a crutch. They threw a thankful look towards Orion and the Centaur nodded at them with tight lips, brandishing his sword upwards again.

But the remaining Vampires didn't take the bait and opted to reassemble after making sure the others in the group were injured and tired enough as to not reciprocate as efficiently as they could. They flew upwards and landed on the top of a partially destroyed shop, not showing any more sign of wanting to attack.

"What are they doing?"

"I don't like the looks of that!"

They all froze at the same time.

"Oh, just great," Sirius deadpanned when the surrounding flames were suddenly quenched and replaced by ice. The ill sensation of

being powerless filled their hearts and they all braced themselves for the worst.

“Looks like Harry will have to deal with Gringotts alone with Charlie,” the Animagus said weakly, trying to stay awake despite the horrendous feeling in his gut and the increasing pain in his abdomen.

“Sirius! Stay with us!” Remus implored and prepared himself to use the Patronus charm while trying in vain to help his friend stay awake.

“Harry...”

The Dementors approached.

Sirius fell unconscious.

Remus held his precious friend tightly, ready to give his life for him, and letting go of his Patronus.

Orion braced himself but fell on his two front knees seconds later as a wave of despair filled his sharp senses.

The rest of the group huddled together and followed Remus' example by using their Patronuses. Their weakened state however did not permit them to use them to their full capacity.

The Vampires watched in glee.

The Dementors fell down in one massive black swoop.

And were all nearly burned to, well, death when a giant fireball literally flew in the sky in their direction, immediately disbanding them. The group grew into shock when a Dragon, a Dragon! zoomed over their heads and caught the few remaining Dementors into its deadly jaw. The Vampires screeched and were catapulted aside by one swipe of a spiked tail and died as soon as another fireball was thrown in their direction, eradicating what was left of Ollivander's Wand shop and its surroundings.

The angered reddish creature roared greatly when all sign of danger disappeared and flew freely in the dark sky, content to finally being able to stretch its wings completely without restraints.

“What the Hell!” Alastor rasped out in disbelief.

“Harry.” Orion spotted his friend and muttered his name softly in relief.

The group’s gaze strayed from the great beast to Harry with difficulty but they were happy to see that neither Charlie nor Harry was seriously injured. A lone Goblin was standing wearily behind them, the worst looking of the three but still very much aware of what was going on around him.

Charlie ran to his limping father and Harry joined Remus as soon as he spotted his unconscious Godfather. “Sirius! Remus, what happened to him!”

Remus grunted and let Harry help him support the Animagus. “It’s not lethal for now but we have to let Poppy treat him as soon as we get back. He got scratched pretty badly on the arm and one of the Vampires broke some ribs. He lost a lot of blood.”

Harry nodded seriously, softly brushing Sirius’ dark locks of hair away from his face in a caring gesture. He frowned; his Godfather was rapidly growing a fever. “Are there any more seriously injured people in the group?”

Tonks looked around her nervously when the Dragon roared again. “Huh, Hestia got bitten on the arm...She’s also unconscious...”

Harry approached said woman and checked her vitals. He sighed. “She isn’t dead and hasn’t been infected. The worst that’ll happen is suffering from a mild case of anemia for a couple of days. That, and probably being prone to stay away from the sun when she can help it. It’ll pass. She hasn’t been bitten long enough to die or Turn. I’m sorry we couldn’t be here sooner,” Harry apologized, his gaze fixing the ground.

A hand rested on his shoulder in comfort and he turned his head towards Orion. "It is not your fault. You couldn't have done anything to prevent what happened. Things like that happen in a war, you have to accept it. But I am curious to know what happened to the both of you," he gestured vaguely towards Charlie at the same time, "inside Gringotts. Where are the Death Eaters?"

Harry and Charlie shared a look. The redhead smirked, giving everyone a vague impression of seeing Fred and George. "Death Eaters? What Death Eaters?"

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

But Charlie's expression changed slightly to one of uncertainty just for a few seconds. No one noticed. What happened back there, this terrible hissing sound overpowering Nagini's in intensity? 'Harry must know something... That hissing sound...Harry didn't make anything of it nor did he seem wary of it... Something that would even make a Dragon back away... Is Harry hiding something from us or was that – thing- another part of Gringotts' defenses?'

The sound of hands clapping made everyone jump and turn nervously towards the forgotten Goblin. "You should go back to Hogwarts to treat the wounded. I will let the Dragon roam around just in case the Death Eaters decide to do a repeat of this whole fiasco until the reinforcements arrive. I must thank you Mr. Weasley, Mr. Potter, for your help in the matter. I will however make sure it does not happen again. We will surely meet in friendlier circumstances later if you survive this war, that is."

"But what about you, Master Gambitts? There are many wounded Goblins inside, much more than you can handle."

"Goblin magic works differently than yours, Mr. Weasley. Gringotts will be secure again in just a few hours; much more secure. I have asked for help in the other nations where Gringotts banks have also been established. Goblin warriors and spellcasters are coming to help us and two more Dragons are on their way with them."

Harry, seemingly content with the fate of Gringotts, urged everyone to touch another broomstick he transfigured and transformed into a Portkey.

Orion gave his friend an anxious stare when he saw the object; he greatly disliked this method of transportation but relented when he realized he had no other choice but to touch it to go back to his peers faster and tell them of his adventures. That did not, however, prevent him from gripping Harry's shoulder with his one free hand to calm his worries a little.

Soon enough they were off and Gringotts was sealed again from the outside world, its treasures and secrets safe once again...to Voldemort's great dismay.

Another chapter done! Yay! I can't believe the numbers of reviews I got! Reviews here, reviews there, reviews everywhere! (giggles)

Everything is starting to wrap up nicely. Orion got his part; I noticed a lot of people liked him (Hell I like him too!). And since it's been a while since there's been some action I decided to make this chapter action-packed. Also, Charlie is starting to ask himself some questions... (insert ominous song)

I could have made the chapter longer but I know the no-update time is making you (and myself included) suffer. So there.

I hope this was to your liking! I'll see you all in the next update!

Eternal Cosmos

Chapter 29: Three

“Tell me Malfoy why I don’t have Gringottsss’ power within my grassp thiss very moment.”

The aristocratic blonde winced and shuddered beneath his mask at the sibilant voice laced with venom...fitting for the Lord of Snakes. Or was he really? Nagini had apparently betrayed Voldemort...No. Better not go along this trail of though less his Lord read them.

Groveling was the only thing Lucius could do right now but he knew that it was a kind of rhetorical question because he knew that whatever answer he gave his Lord would let him taste a Cruciatus or two, and not responding was certainly out of the question.

Either he took too long to answer or his Lord was (bad) humoring him because a tight fist hit the armchair. “It’s because thiss plan had flawss, Luciusss! The damn Potter boy! CRUCIO!”

Draco whimpered behind his screaming father but did not move to help.

“Finite Incantatum.”

A careless wave of the hand, a careless tone of voice.

“And tell me, dear Luciusss, who came up with thiss brilliant idea to take possession of the powercore of Gringottss, which inevitably cossst me FIVE Vampiress allies, Lordss and Childes from their own ressspective Housesss?”

Lucius kept silent this time and braced himself for the worst. Of course, it came in the form of another Cruciatus curse, which left him weak and slightly disoriented when it was finally lifted.

“You are lucky I need ALL the alliesss I can get for this because I would have put you out of your misery a long time ago. Luciusss, Luciusss, what hasss become of you?”

Voldemort got up and walked gracefully to his shaking servant, bringing up a well manicured hand to lift the chin of the blonde man. "You were once magnificent, an unequalled strategist and a master of torture. Look at you now, trembling in fear instead of excitement and bloodlust."

He let Malfoy go rather harshly, who immediately stumbled on his knees after being released from the vice-grip on his chin, and then looked at all the present Death Eaters.

"Look at all of you! I see nothing but a bunch of weak, dare I call you that, Wizards! No longer do you hold your head up high, no longer do you walk with a straight back! You cower and hesitate when you should destroy and kill! Ohhh, what has become of my Dark Army? Or was there ever such an army?" came the hissed lament.

Voldemort did something very un-Voldemort like; he practically dropped on his throne-like chair and hid his face in his hand, an elbow on the armrest the only support he had if he didn't want to drop out of the chair unceremoniously.

Many Death Eaters fidgeted in shame. Their Lord was right. Since the Potter boy arrived, many things started to go completely haywire.

The loss of many allied forces, the biggest of them all being the Werewolves, for once. Voldemort was able to prevent the complete desertion of the Werewolves from their ranks but the loss of Fenrir Greyback had made quite a few of the beasts turn their backs on them.

There was also the loss of many of their own comrades at the hands...no, at the bite of Nagini. The loss of their Master's own pet familiar; nobody liked the meddling snake from the start but it had been damn useful for spying.

The plan on invading the Forbidden Forest was burned to ashes even before it really started.

And then the Dementors' numbers had greatly diminished as well.

Now the boy was threatening their Lord's liaison with the Vampires!

"No my Lord! We are not beaten yet!" a courageously foolish voice shouted from the Death Eater group.

Silence ensued.

Thick and unbearable silence.

Every head turned towards the masked fool, then slowly to Voldemort. He was watching his Death Eaters with an unreadable expression, a dangerous yet encouraging glint in his red eyes.

Seeing as he wasn't going to hex the babbling fool, the others slowly started to follow the example, thinking that it was what their Lord needed to hear.

"He is right!" a voice shouted from somewhere to the left.

"We still have our brethren from other countries!" another voiced from the right.

Soon their enthusiasm to fight was rekindled and they all started to rejoice and talk and shout about the next war.

An explosion-like sound made everyone jump and all eyes turned upwards to admire the green snake coiling around the skull in veneration.

Voldemort stood up from his throne and all eyes laid on him in an instant. "If that iss what you all wish then who am I to deter you from your goal? Fine! A war you want, a war you'll get! I want every available Death Eater here in three daysss!"

The Death Eaters shouted in joy and chanted their veneration of the Darkest Lord of all time. Voldemort massaged his temples. "Why are you all dallying here about? Get out and do ass I ordered, you pathetic lot of moronsss!"

Everyone scurried away in a matter of minutes, the insult seemingly having no effect whatsoever to deter their renewed enthusiasm.

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“ ... And then the Dragon soared through the dark skies and annihilated the Vampires and scattered the Dementors to high winds!”

A chorus of impressionable youngsters resounded in excitement while the adults chuckled at Orion’s story telling and wide gesticulation, a rare sight coming from the usually calm Centaur.

“Looks like you’ve had quite the adventure, young one, and a dangerous one at that. Maybe it would have been better if you had stayed here with us.”

Orion made a face and winced slightly when Xi continued to disinfect his wounds. The black female huffed elegantly. “He is old enough to fight. He has been trained and you know that war is inevitable. It was only a matter of time before he was subjected to it.”

“Then why were we not asked to participate?” Mathias of the Red Clan asked with slight jealousy in his tone. Clearly he was upset that he missed the action and surely a chance to prove himself to his peers.

Bane pounded the ground a couple of times. “Do not be so hasty. You will get your chance to fight and surely you will not find it as pleasing as you think.”

Harry, who was standing beside the injured Centaur, nodded to Bane’s reasoning. “Orion was just standing there at the right time, although he was spying upon us more than anything else.”

Orion’s cheeks reddened slightly in embarrassment when the children tried to hide their laughter.

“And besides, Bane has a good point. You may be eager now but you’ll regret it later when you’re on the battlefield. This is nothing like your spars when you train. People die or are gravely injured, there’s blood everywhere and screams and chaos. You don’t know who your friends are or who your enemies are at times because there’s so much noise and so many people around you that you just don’t have the time to differentiate them all. And you constantly have to be on alert because you never know whether you’ll live through it or not. And then there’s the fact that you never know how many of your friends and family members will perish amongst the war heroes until you discover their bodies scattered about, their eyes open yet unseeing...”

Harry’s voice became faint as he got lost in his own memories, his usually green eyes glazed over as he recalled his war’s gruesome happenings.

Mathias fidgeted, his sour mood completely vanishing to make way for uncertainty. The others kept quiet and averted their gaze from Harry as he gave off waves of anger, anguish and lonesomeness. Their empathy could not take this kind of emotions very well and it was with a heavy heart that Orion put a hand on Harry’s shoulder gently to make him snap out of the horrors of his past.

The boy blinked but did not say anything. Not even his eyes betrayed his feelings and he stepped away from the herd a little and walked to the door of the Room of Requirements. “Harry?” Orion started uncertainly only to be waved off by said boy.

“I want to see Sirius and Remus in the Hospital Wing and then I’m going to take a nap. I advise you to do the same. I’ll see you all later.”

And with that he was gone.

“...Will he be alright?” Vega of the Blond Clan asked tentatively after a moment of silence.

“He will be. T’is only natural that he wants to see the closest people to him, especially when said people died where he is from. I assure

you it will not weaken his resolve but only amplify it to serve for his needs. He is a strong boy, a strong human with a good head on his shoulders,” Firenze said as he put a hand on Vega’s back.

She stiffened and a small patch of red appeared on her cheeks, making Mathias and his friends snicker. Firenze blinked and took his hand back. Vega looked between said hand and her snickering friends and gave them a glare to remember. They quickly learned to keep their mouth shut.

Jihl of the Black Clan rasped his throat after another moment of silence. “Hum, well then, I suppose you should go rest for a while to let your wounds heal correctly. We will call for you if trouble arises.”

“But I still have to clean my sword...”

A small hand patted one of his legs and Orion looked down to Trix, the small fifteen years old parentless foal. “Can I do it?” he asked slowly, surprising the others about his sudden forwardness.

Orion blinked and opened his mouth, closed it and then gazed quickly to Xi who was the female in command of the Black herd. Said female nodded with a tender smile and Van, the seventy-five years old whom Trix had developed brotherly feelings for, told him that it was great for Trix to want to participate in his own way since he was too young to do battle.

“If you put it this way then. Here you go, just be careful not to hurt yourself with it.”

The young foal nodded enthusiastically and galloped away to find a source of water to clean the sword. Van laughed at the youngster’s eagerness and followed Trix in a slower pace. “Not so fast or you will trip and hurt yourself! You have time!”

Orion shook his head in amusement and bid the others goodbye. He found a nice looking tree that gave off enough shade and lay down at the base, falling asleep in seconds to the sound of chirping birds.

The curious students who were blocking the way parted immediately when Harry walked in their line of vision. The Weasley twins sent them dally dallying away as soon as they saw his facial expression.

“Harry! What happened to you?”

“Yeah! You are as bloody as the rest of them!”

Harry sighed. “It’s of no importance now. How are things in the Hospital Wing?”

“T’was still hectic a couple of minutes ago-”

“-but now things have calmed down. Snape-”

“-was here also, trying to shove a couple of potions down Professor Black’s throat when he woke up-”

“-but he refused vehemently and they had to stun him to make him take it. T’was-”

“-hilarious. If a little bloody. Everybody who’s not injured is gone now.”

Both redheads grinned despite the tense situation. Harry sighed, trying to shake off a headache that promised to be unrelenting. “Alright. Can you do me a favor? Please lock the door when I’m in. I don’t wish to be disturbed by any more curious onlookers and I’m certain they wish to have some privacy to heal.”

George and Fred nodded, a tint of pink underneath their freckled cheeks. After all, they had been spying upon the current victims of Poppy Pomfrey, too.

“Of course, our dear partner in crime! Anything for you!”

“Yes, anything indeed, oh great secret Investor of ours!”

Harry chuckled tiredly. "Good. One last thing..." his face regained a frighteningly serious expression. "Tell everyone to train seriously for this war."

The twins' smiles dampened and a chorus of "yes" was the last thing Harry heard before they closed and locked the doors of the Hospital Wing. Harry closed his eyes, relieved at the sudden silence, until he heard his name being called in a hushed voice.

"Harry?"

"Remus? You're awake? Were we talking too loudly?" Harry approached Lupin's bed; the man was now slowly propping himself up and leaning on the pillows.

"Nah. I was only resting a little. It was either this or suffer Sirius' fate. Poppy gave him a strong dose of Sleeping Potion before she took the stunner off." Remus' eyes lit up when Harry rolled his eyes.

"Why don't I have any troubles believing you?"

Remus smiled gently and patted his bed for Harry to sit on. The boy didn't waste his time and sat right beside him, leaning on the man a bit.

"Don't roll your eyes. He wanted to get away because he wanted to see you first. You know he cares, right? We both do."

Harry let Remus pull him against his chest and leaned his back more fully into the warmth. The man's roughened hand then proceeded to lightly pet his hair. Harry sighed and relaxed completely, the day's event suddenly taking its toll.

"Yes, I know. And you both know that you are the most important people in my life, right?"

Harry felt the man nod and tighten his hold.

When the sudden silence became unbearable, Harry asked about the others.

“They’re all sleeping. No one’s in danger. Poppy did had to ask for a little extra help from one of St-Mungo’s nurses who has taken residence here to treat Hestia’s bite but as you said she’ll only be a little anemic for a couple of days and sun-shy. Actually that’s why the curtains are closed; normally we would have slept even through daylight but it made Hestia squirm so Poppy shut them.”

“I’m glad...”

Silence again.

Harry tried to prevent a yawn but failed miserably, making Remus chuckle lightly. The older man repositioned himself so that he was lying on his back and motioned for Harry to lie down beside him. “Come on, we better rest for a bit or Poppy’ll have our heads. And unlike you, my old age is starting to show. I’m not as young as I used to be, you know.”

Harry lay on his side, using Remus’ arm as a pillow and the man’s body warmth as a blanket. “You liar,” Harry muttered before yawning again, “you’re not -that- old and Werewolves actually have a longer living span than us.”

The man chuckled again, his chest rising slightly with each breath. “You got me there, cub. Now sleep, we’ll both need it.”

Harry nodded, spared a glance towards his Godfather who was sleeping in a bed nearby and let the man’s calming breathing lull him to sleep.

Harry woke up several hours later with a silent gasp. His human source of heat was gone; instead a blanket had been put on him. Getting up, he looked around and noticed all the others were still here. Remus was the only one who had got up. He strolled to Sirius who was snoring softly and sat down beside his Godfather’s sleeping body, petting the long black hair softly.

Harry's eyes softened and he kissed Sirius' brow, partially hugging the man in the process. "I won't let anything happen to you or Remus, I promise. I'll do anything in my power to protect you both and Hogwarts..." Harry stood up and proceeded to unlock the door of the Hospital Wing, "...even if I have to give my life to succeed..."

He smiled determinedly and turned around. "But if I go down, I won't be without one hell of a fight and I'll bring Tom with me."

He placed a Disillusion charm on himself and used a secret passage leading to the second floor. Moaning Myrtle screamed in fright when the wall in the back of her cubicle opened and she plunged in the toilet, splashing water everywhere with the force of her dive.

Harry ignored her and went directly to the sink. "Open."

Nagini poked her head out of his shirt and he smiled at her and petted her head.

"Finite Incantatem." The Disillusion charm wore off.

"Wingardium Leviosa." Using the charm on himself, he was able to slowly get down the pipe before it closed off again.

About ten minutes later Harry was standing in front of Salazar Slytherin's statue. He invoked the great Basilisk and Salazar slid down the mouth when it opened. "Ahh, Masster Harry. I wass beginning to wonder when you would come sssee me. You look well, ass doess Nagini."

Nagini bowed her thanks in a snake-like way, Harry imitating her. "We have you to thank for that, don't we? But how did you know where I wass and how did you get there? Diagon Alley isss a long way from here," Harry hissed to his third companion, the first and second being Hedwig and Nagini respectively.

His thought swiveled to his pet owl that must be waiting for him in his own quarters but Harry was brought back to the living when Salazar spoke again.

“I hope you did not think I ssslithered my way there out in the open. The only way I can travel with sstealth is by tunnelss. Ssso if there are no tunnelss, I create some. I have made many pathwayss underground ssince you have firsst come to ssee me. I can ssprout out of the ground almosst anywhere around the casstle, making it useful for ssurprise attacksss. Asss for Diagon Alley, I also followed you underground, creating the tunnel towards the direction I felt you. Think of it asss a bond of ssome sssort. I could not let you go ssso far without a major kind of protection.”

Harry put a hand on the Basilisk’s nose. “Well, I thank you for following me. I did not think there would be Vampiress outside and without you Charlie and I would have been Dragon-food.”

Salazar scoffed and sprouted something unintelligible about Dragons and their high and mighty attitude. Nagini agreed whole-heartedly, making Harry blink at the both of them and laugh out loud at their seriousness.

“Ssalazar, it’ss good that you thought about the tunnelss in advance. We’ll need them now more than ever. Be prepared, I will ssummon you when it’ss time.”

The Basilisk acquiesced and Harry bid it good bye, going back to the surface by the same way he got down. As soon as the entryway closed, Fawkes appeared in a burst of fire. Harry extended his arm and the Phoenix used it as a perch. “Hey Fawkes. Is there an Order meeting in Dumbledore’s office?”

The magical bird thrilled in negative. ‘Hm, so I’m only being summoned by the Headmaster...’

“Can you make us apparate there?”

Fawkes thrilled again and they disappeared in a burst of fire.

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Albus was sucking on a Lemon Drop when they reappeared. The old man offered Harry some, which he politely declined, and he refused to sit down.

“Very well, Harry. I invoked you here because I wanted to know what happened in Gringotts. You and Charlie Weasley got out pretty much unscathed after having to face a Dragon. I invited Mister Weasley before you and he told me that there was something else below your feet that made the Dragon calm down. The dear boy himself was pretty nervous when he told me this. To my knowledge there isn’t anything else guarding Gringotts so I was wondering if you knew something.”

Harry stayed calm under the watchful gaze of the Headmaster and lifted an eyebrow when he felt a tendril of Legilimency brushing against his very solid and unrelenting mental wall.

Albus looked at him sheepishly and shrugged. “T’was worth a try. But seriously, do you know something about what happened?”

Harry sighed. “Whatever happened was beneficial and kept us alive, leave it at that. Now it’s my turn to ask you something. Are the people here prepared for this war?...” Harry’s face darkened considerably. “Because we have three days.”

Albus’ eyes widened. “Are you certain? How do you know this?”

Harry shook his head. “I know. I just know. So, are we ready?”

The old man looked suddenly his age. “I will tell the others to accelerate their training regiment. If you want to see Remus he is currently in the Great Hall.”

Harry nodded. “Do so, but let them sleep also. A tired Wizard is a dead Wizard. And thanks for the info.”

“Of course. Good day Mister Potter.”

Harry nodded to the man, gazed surreptitiously towards Nigellus' portrait and walked out.

He was on the way to see his Werewolf friend when halfway there two hands shot out of a shadowed corner and grabbed him from behind, making it impossible for him to speak or grab his wand to point it at the intruder.

“Don't move.”

Harry froze and narrowed his eyes when he recognized the voice of Charlie Weasley.

“I want to know where you were. I'm taking my hand away from your mouth; take it in consideration that my wand is pointed at your throat. Scream and I'll bind and shut you up so fast that you won't even see it coming.”

The hand on his mouth slowly retracted.

Harry scoffed lightly. “I'm above screaming, Charlie. What do you think you're doing-”

The hand around his arms and torso stiffened and the other boy's wand dug slightly in his throat. “Don't evade the question.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “I was in Dumbledore's office.”

The wand dug a little deeper. Harry forced himself not to wince.

“Don't play with me. Where were you right before that? Dumbledore asked to see me right before you. He told me he wanted to see you afterwards to ask you the same questions he did me. What neither of you took in consideration is that away from the Headmaster's eyes but near mine, right on the edge of his desk, there was the Marauder's Map. I saw your name come down the Hospital Wing but it suddenly disappeared on the second floor. Where were you?”

Harry mentally cussed.

“Hogwarts bears many secrets, Charlie. I merely keep those I know as much as I can.”

Charlie knew it was the only answer he would receive to this question.

“Then tell me what happened in Gringotts!” he whispered harshly. “And don’t sprout the lie that you don’t know! Whatever thing that was down there was threatening enough to scare a Dragon into submission! It scared me shitless! Fuck I’m still scared! But you! You didn’t even bat an eyelash! You know what that thing was! Goddammit Potter! If you pose a threat to my family I will eviscerate you!”

‘So this is what it’s all about. I commend Charlie for loving his family so much. Especially since he got enough balls to threaten me. He! He! Too bad it’s not working as well as it should.’

Harry chuckled, making the wand dig deeper again. Harry completely ignored the threat.

“Why won’t you cooperate? Damn! My wand is pointed on your neck and ready to be used!”

Harry closed his eyes and smirked. “I don’t know. Probably because Nagini is out and waiting for my order to bite your arm off.”

Charlie’s eyes widened and he pushed Harry away from him with a yelp. The snake really was out and whereas it had kept quiet while preparing to attack, now it was hissing quite menacingly.

The green eyed boy sighed and put a hand on Nagini’s head to stop her hissing fit.

“I commend you, Charlie. Not many people have the balls to attack me. But it’s futile. I’m on the side of light even though I am a –gray-Wizard. I do specialize in the Dark Arts but I would never intentionally

harm a Weasley. Do you know why? Because I considered you as family, and I still do, even if we're not as close here as we were in my old world. You try to protect your family and I admire that."

Harry breathed out.

"Charlie, what happened in Gringotts will happen again if my life is threatened on the battlefield, which it will. You can call it my...guardian, if you will. It will pose no threat to you if you pose no threat to me."

Charlie finally relaxed. "I...I'm sorry. But I had to have some answers. I won't allow my family to be harmed."

Harry nodded and turned around. "What I told Dumbledore I will tell you: we have three days, no more, no less. You better prepare yourself."

"Three days! That's not enough!"

Harry started to walk away. "I know. Dumbledore knows. But this is all we have. But let me tell you this: Hogwarts knows how to defend herself."

Charlie looked puzzled and as Harry rounded a corner the green eyed boy turned his head to glance at him one last time. "Oh, and one more thing. Some time or the other it will be better for you to close your eyes on the battlefield. Bye Charlie, train well."

And with that, Harry was gone for the redhead's sight.

"What the hell did he mean by that? Close my eyes? Is he nuts? I'll die if I close my eyes! He's so weird..." Charlie muttered before going to train with his brother Bill who was waiting for him in a classroom.

.....

Harry joined Remus in the Great Hall after saying hello to his friends and he explained their predicament.

“So we have three days...”

Remus put some distance between Harry and him and pointed his wand towards his charge. “Then train with me, cub. Let’s show the Dark Lord that we will not go down without a fight!” the Werewolf said vehemently.

The people who were listening watched in awe as Harry and Remus bowed and started to fire spell after spell, curse after curse. Some students took notes, like Hermione, and some winced at some obviously dark spells being used.

Snape joined the fray and offered to duel against the winner.

Everyone’s training restarted and they all doubled their efforts.

Harry evaded a Septumsempra from Snape and crouched on the ground like a predator. ‘We won’t lose!’ He then transformed into his Animagus form and attacked the Potions Master with renewed vigor.

Finally another chapter! Gah, they’re becoming tougher and tougher to write. I hate doing war scenes. They’re a b!tch to write but I won’t have a choice. As for the time it’s taking me to write, the explanations are on my Yahoo page “Eternal Expectations” (check in my bio). I’m too lazy right now to write them.

Constructive or-and encouraging reviews are welcome! Wow, I got 2883 of them! I’ll breach the 3000 soon! –faints-

Flamers will be ignored and probably bitched and killed by the rest of my faithful reviewers. Anyway, if they hate it so much why do they read the whole story and then take the time to write me back? It’s only augmenting my numbers of reviews anyway, hah! (Though I have very few flaming friends, thank God :)

Well, I hope you all liked! And don’t kill Charlie, he had good intentions...

Eternal Cosmos

XXX

Chapter 30 : The Challenge

-Last time-

Harry joined Remus in the Great Hall after saying hello to his friends and he explained their predicament.

“So we have three days...”

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-Now-

Ron sagged on the floor and started panting harshly. “Gosh, that was some training!”

Some of his fellow Gryffindors grumbled and followed his example.

“I can’t believe Harry actually made us do muggle push-ups and sit-ups! I tell ya, if I go to sleep now you’ll have to pry my body off the floor because I won’t wake up!” Seamus whined.

Hermione sat down with a little more elegance and huffed. "Oh, stop complaining. Harry has our best interest at heart. He didn't complain once even when he was bombarded by spells from every direction by the professors. Shows that he's in better shape than us all."

"Humph! Slave driver..." Ron muttered, which in turn earned him a glare from his girlfriend. "What? I'm right! Harry was trained for this sort of thing! He's already used to it!"

Fred and George, who were walking by at this exact moment, stopped momentarily and both pointed their index finger on their youngest brother's chest.

"And you better"

"get used to it!"

"Or else your life will be"

"forfeit before the battle even starts."

Ron slapped the poking fingers away. "I know, I know."

The twins sent him a meaningful look and walked away, leaving a blinking Ron behind. Ginny shivered. "What's wrong Ginny?" Luna asked to the disturbed girl.

"Hmm... I could've sworn they were being serious..."

Ron shared a look with his sister. "I know...disturbing..."

.....

"Remus! Wait up!"

Harry ran up to the Werewolf just as he was getting upstairs. "Going to see Sirius?"

Remus nodded. "Yes, I think it's about time the potion's effect wore off."

"...You think?"

Remus chuckled and shrugged. "Well, Madam Pomfrey did give him a lot so I can't be completely accurate. Here we are!"

The older man pushed the door to the Infirmary and let Harry in before following suite. The green eyed boy almost froze when he noticed Dumbledore in the room, bent over someone's bed; Mad-Eye's to be more precise. Then he noticed Mad-Eye, awake and leaning on his bedpost, talking back to the Leader of the Order.

' Probably about what happened back at Gringotts.' Mentally scoffing, he proceeded to Sirius' bed without sparing Albus a second glance.

Remus fidgeted slightly when Dumbledore watched Harry subtly from the corner of his eyes but the Werewolf followed his cub nonetheless. He was too preoccupied with Sirius' health condition to care about the Order Leader right now.

"Sirius, how are you?" Harry asked in concern.

The Animagus shrugged. "Meh, I'm alright now." Sirius motioned Harry and Remus to come nearer and whispered to them: "Madam Pomfrey did an excellent job but don't tell her I said that... After the foul potion she made me drink..."

Harry and Remus chuckled when Sirius made a face. "Well, she gave me a clean bill of health so I'm free to go. Others weren't so fortunate and have to stay a little longer, like poor Hestia."

"That's great Sirius. We'll be able to continue training," Remus finished.

As the three of them made their way out, half of the Weasley family made their way in and Harry bumped into Molly as she was walking

to her husband's bedside. Harry whispered an apology and quickly walked out of the Infirmary, completely aware that Charlie and Bill Weasley were drilling a hole at the back of his head with their intense gaze. The green eyed boy quickly saw to the problem by closing the door behind him.

"You seem tense, cub. Is there something wrong?" Remus asked softly.

Harry, who had accelerated and was walking ahead of them, slowed down so they could follow at a more leisure pace.

"Hmm. Charlie approached me earlier, in fact before I went to the Great Hall to train. Something's bugging me... Dumbledore called for him before me so he could tell his version of what happened in Gringotts. When I finally got out Charlie...accosted me and asked me where I was before I went to see Dumbledore but after I was with the Centaurs. He said he saw my name going around in Hogwarts on the map on the edge of Dumbledore's desk, but affirmed that my name disappeared when it reached the second floor. Thing is: this world's Marauder's Map isn't supposed to show my name, but mine does, and I never gave Albus my map."

Harry eyed Sirius with suspicion when the Animagus winced. "Aw, crap! I used it not too long ago to retrace you and instead of leaving it in your room I may have taken it with me. I probably dropped it and one of the Order members picked it up and recognized the parchment. Sorry Harry."

The green eyed boy sighed while Remus rolled his eyes.

"Well, what's done is done but I want that map back; it holds sentimental value".

"We'll do, cub. Charlie probably is the only one who saw your name on it so I don't think Dumbledore is foolish enough to leave the Map on the edge of his desk when there is a clear difference on it. I think they may have left ours somewhere in the Order Meeting Room."

Harry sighed and brought his arm up. "Nagini, can you do sssomething for me?"

The snake slithered down Harry's arm and to the ground. "Yesss?"

"Can you go to the third floor and get the Marauder'ss Map for me? The protection charm issn't desssigned to trigger if an animal enterss the room, I know because Fawkesss can enter whenever he wishess. You'll be able to get in by a hole in the door."

"Ahh yesss, the bird that looksss like a Peacock... Of coursse, I will get the map. I will sssee you later, Masster Harry."

The trio watched Nagini slither away and Harry snickered. "What's so funny?"

Remus asked curiously. Sirius raised an eyebrow. "Sorry... Nagini just called Fawkes a bird that looks like a Peacock. We're lucky Fawkes didn't hear that."

Sirius coughed to cover a snort of laughter. "Only a snake can find a way to badmouth a Phoenix. We'll, let's go. Nagini will find you when she gets the Marauder's Map."

"Right."

"...So Harry, what really happened back at Gringotts?"

"...Salazar."

Remus and Sirius shared a look. "Riiight."

"Masster?"

Harry blinked and looked down. The group of Ravenclaws who were listening to his instructions watched warily as the black haired boy picked his snake up and spoke in Parseltongue.

"Potter?" Cedric asked tentatively.

The boy blinked out of his conversation and the serpent went back under his master's skin.

“Sorry Diggory. Something came up. Well, I hope you all know what to do when the time comes. You'll just have to search for more spells in the library if you're looking for something in particular.”

“But Potter, your knowledge of spells would be enough for us! Why don't you want to teach us more?!”

Harry sighed and was about to respond when Sirius' voice echoed behind him. “It's not that he doesn't want to, Mister Diggory, it's that he cannot teach you anything else. Harry's knowledge in battle spells unfortunately has a tendency to turn towards the dark side.”

“Professor Black!” A couple of Ravenclaws exclaimed. They looked at Harry momentarily and fled after murmuring a few apologies.

“Hey Harry, Nagini came back?”

“Yeah. Thanks for helping me back there. It can be such a drag to deter Ravenclaw students from their goal...information gathering, that is. As for Nagini, she got the Map. She put it on the desk in my room. Can you guys do me a favour and hold Dumbledore up a bit? I'll go exchange the Maps right now.”

“Sure thing, but be careful. Dumbledore's office can be rigged with protection charms.”

Harry nodded and set off to get the Marauder's Map.

“Hope he'll be alright...” Remus said with a bit of worry.

“Don't panic; kid's got resources.” Sirius padded his friend's back. “Now off to find the Headmaster!”

Looking at his right and then at his left, Harry marched straight up to the statue guarding the entrance of Dumbledore's office when he

didn't detect any sign of danger or an unwanted presence. However, when he stopped in front of the gargoyle it literally growled and turned his back at him.

"You again..." Harry growled back.

"Fawkes!"

The Phoenix appeared in a burst of fire, thrilled melodiously and caught his arm before disappearing again, leaving a disgruntled gargoyle in their wake.

They reappeared on the other side in Albus' office and Fawkes flew to his perch after a few thankful pats on his back.

"Well, well! Look who's here! Haven't seen you in a while, boy! Hm, the meetings are getting sparser now, wonder what's going on..."

Harry looked up. "Hello Phineas. Voldemort's going to attack in a few days so everyone is getting last minute training. I won't be here for long; Sirius and Remus are distracting Albus while I'm getting something of mine back. Did you see Dumbledore put a piece of parchment away, by any chance?"

Nigellus' body bent down to look at him better. "A piece of parchment, you say? I've seen plenty around here."

Harry grunted and walked around in impatience, looking for it on the bookshelves, not daring to open any armoires. "Not like this one, that's for sure. Last time I was here it was on the edge of the desk. Charlie Weasley came in before me and saw it. It's the Marauder's Map."

"Ah, then I wasn't here when you were last in this office. I indeed saw Mister Weasley and saw it fit to find you when I heard where their conversation was heading. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to find you in time and came back after you were gone from the office. I saw the old man, however, putting a parchment away in his desk's lower

drawer some time later. Maybe what you are looking for is hidden there?”

“Thanks for the info.” Harry walked swiftly up to the desk and blindly put his hand on the handle...and got the shock of his life.

“OUCH! Goddamn!”

He nurtured his singed hand. The protective bubble that was visible only moments ago when he touched the handle just disappeared again, as if mocking him. “Shit!”

“Ah yes, mind the shields, would you? They can be a little tricky!”

“Goddammit Phineas! You’re just telling me this now! The spell almost burned my hand off!” Harry used a healing charm on his throbbing hand.

The man in the portrait merely shrugged infuriatingly and continued to watch Harry as the boy inspected the desk and tried some counter spells.

“Alohomora!...Abscindo!”

“You know these simple spells won’t do. Dumbledore may be incredibly old and on the borderline of being considered senile but he isn’t called one of the greatest Wizards of all time for nothing.”

Harry put his hands on the desk and lowered his head in annoyance. “Well then why don’t you HELP ME?!”

“Sorry, no can do, lad. I do not know what kind of spell he used. Probably a very hard and powerful one, though. Sooo...Mind telling me why I searched for nothing the other day?”

The portrait continued his ranting as Harry grew more and more frustrated with the spelled drawer. Not one of his incantations was working. “I wasn’t anywhere that’s known to any Hogwarts teacher or student: Salazar Slytherin’s Chamber of Secrets. Erumpo!...Dilorico!”

The spells just rebounded off the shield and vanished into thin air.

“Ah yes, the infamous Chamber! True, not even I know of its location, and even so I do not think there are any portraits there for me to travel into.”

Harry's fist hit the desk, making Fawkes shriek in surprise before going back to sleep. “Still not working! Knowing Dumbledore he probably incorporated a lot of different spells into this shield, maybe even runes! I don't have all day!”

Harry pointed his wand towards the drawer again and was about to try another one of his spells when an alarm blared to life. Phineas jumped and Fawkes woke up, flying around in distress in the office, though not leaving it.

“By Merlin, are we being invaded already?! You said Hogwarts still had a couple of days left!” the retired Headmaster bellowed, covering his ears from the infernal sound.

Harry ran to the nearest window and looked down. “SHIT!”

He turned to Phineas and then the desk with a renewed determination. “Can you tell me how the HELL Voldemort got himself Nundus and Manticores?!”

Phineas' eyes nearly bugged out of his head and looked on helplessly as Harry pointed his wand at the desk again.

“The man IS a Dark Lord!”

Harry sneered. “If everything goes right in a few days he'll be a dead man and an even deader Dark Lord.”

Phineas chuckled weakly. “Is deader even a word?”

Harry shrugged. “You get the drift. Now let's do this!”

“Do what? The drawer is too well protected! Leave it at that and go help the others!”

“Not. Without. My. Map!”

And with that he simply jammed his wand in the bubble, making it hiss and sputter and shoot annoying and dangerous sparks of random magic around. Harry’s wand started to glow a bright red and he almost let go of it when it started to literally burn his hand with the intensity of magic output.

“COME ON! OPEN!”

Not even aware that he spoke in Parseltongue, he started to put more and more of his own magic in his wand to counter the spell. “I just need it to recede for a few seconds!...That’s it! COHIBEO!”

His glowing wand let out a blood red mist that made the shield recede wherever it touched the bubble, as if it was eating it away. When Harry deemed the hole big enough for his hand to fit in he let the mist solidify, thus making it impossible for Dumbledore’s spell to close back on his hand. He quickly opened the drawer and exchanged both maps before his spell sizzled and died out, his wand not being there to stabilize the restraining incantation any longer.

The bubble reformed silently and became invisible again, making it impossible for Dumbledore to know if someone had actually tampered with his spell.

The alarm quickly made him blink out of his short-lived victory and he ran from the office after a quick goodbye to Fawkes and Phineas, clearly intending on helping his fellow Hogwarts residents.

Some of the teachers, parents and older students were already on the move by closing all doors and ordering the younger students to go back to their dormitories when Harry ran past them, clearly intending on helping outside. Someone caught his arm before he could actually open Hogwarts’ main doorway.

“Ugh!” he grunted as his momentum was brusquely pulled to a stop.

“Harry! You can’t go there! The doors have been sealed by Dumbledore! Nobody can pass!” Rosmerta explained rapidly when he tried to make her lose her grip on him.

“Crap! I don’t have enough time to unseal the door. Who’s outside?”

Rosmerta let go of him when she was certain Harry wouldn’t touch the dangerous spellwork. “Dumbledore himself is outside, they should be okay. Most of the Order is there to take care of the problem.”

Harry relaxed. They turned around when they saw Minerva trying to stop a student from passing.

“But Professor!”

“I said no, Mister Creevey! We specifically ordered every student to go back to their dormitories! You disobeyed us!”

“But Professor!”

She shushed the blond boy again sternly when another student came rushing downstairs, this time a Ravenclaw Prefect. “What’s this?! Don’t-listen-to-teachers-day?!” McGonagall cried out in anger. She put herself in the way of the Prefect to stop him.

“Professor! I made the count and Hermione Granger is missing!”

“WHAT?!”

Many teachers turned around in fright.

“Professor! That’s what I wanted to tell you!” Colin finally said in despair. “I saw them slip away by a secret passage before I could stop them! I think they went outside!”

Tonks stormed to the young boy and nearly choked him when she caught Colin by the collar. “WHO boy?!” she asked frantically.

“Gah! Hum, Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnegan! Ron stopped Ginny before she could get through. They said they wanted to help and that they were tired of being ordered around like children!”

A couple of people gasped and the Metamorphmagus was about to say something when Harry shoved them aside and ran upstairs, cussing loudly all the while.

“I’LL BRING THEM BACK!”

“...Though it’ll probably teach them a very valuable lesson...” he muttered to himself.

When Harry arrived, having jumped out of his room’s window with his trusty Firebolt, the problem was barely being controlled. The Order had obviously discovered the misfit students and by trying to protect them their offensive was lacking, though Dumbledore was keeping a steady flow of attacks going.

He quickly flew next to Xiomara who, with her advantageous airborne position, was practically bombarding the dangerous magical animals, or at least trying to; Nundus were goddamn fast creatures and if the flying instructor even tried to get nearer one of them could very well jump high enough to reach her or unleash its near-fatal breath upon her.

“Harry! What are you doing -STUPEFY!- here?!” Xiomara asked between flying around deftly and spellcasting.

“I heard some Gryffindors were foolish enough to go outside unprepared. I’ll lend a hand. I’ll distract the creatures, you tell everyone, students included, to just fire stunners and whatever they find useful at them!”

“Wait Harry!”

But the green eyed boy was already making his way down over where most of the Nundus and Manticores were holding position.

Xiomara hurried up when she saw that Sirius and Remus were about to become a very deathly shade of white upon seeing their Godson.

“Guys! Harry’s going to distract them! He said not to worry about him and just fire stunners and hexes, whatever is useful!”

Remus moaned as he got ready. “That boy is going to give me a heart attack one day!”

The flying woman growled. “You can give these four” she gestured towards the shaking Gryffindors, “one hell of a detention if they come out of this war alive! It’s their fault he came outside in the first place! Not because he doesn’t trust the Order!”

Since they knew they were already in deep, they strengthened their resolve and levelled their wand at the ready. “We came outside because we didn’t want to be treated like children anymore! I know we are at fault and that what we did is completely irresponsible, but I don’t regret it! Now I know a little bit of what we are getting into. I want to help, not be scared of everything I will surely see when the time comes!” Hermione said bravely.

Her left leg was bleeding and she was looking quite pale, but her speech made the other three nod and start firing hexes to slow the creatures down.

The Order chose to ignore the trouble they caused for now by following their example and start shooting spells. Poor Harry was flying way too low for his own good and many a time when a Manticore or Nundu nearly closed its massive jaw on the end of his broomstick or around one of his legs.

The three rows of razor sharp teeth of the Manticores seemed to be a motivation for Harry to really test his broom’s limits.

The Order, plus the four Gryffindors, were finally making progress when a Nundu evaded Harry's sight for a second and jumped high enough to give him quite a blow with its clawed paw.

Harry's breath caught in his throat as he was catapulted on the ground, his head hitting a tree and his Firebolt disappearing into the Forbidden Forest altogether.

Sirius and Remus cried out when Harry didn't get up immediately and was quickly surrounded by the remaining creatures. They knew they couldn't risk sending stunners right now; they were too far away and one of the creatures could very well move out of the spell's way, hitting Harry instead and making him unable to even move to defend himself.

Sirius, fearing for his Godson's safety, was about to rush to him when Ron pushed him out of the way and ran towards the beasts, waving his arm in the air to get their attention.

Everyone cried out for him to get back in the formation but it was too late when a Nundu jumped on the redhead and bit his arm. Ron screamed in pain but knocked the Nundu out with a well placed Refracto in the ribs, shattering them at wand point.

The other magical animals started to gather around him and he levelled his wand with difficulty, trying in vain to stop the blood from flowing even further. At least his action made everyone move and a giant, grim-like dog jumped on a Manticore that was about to finish Ron off.

Spells started to fly in every direction. Harry, who had now regained complete consciousness after hearing Ron's scream, transformed as well and aided Padfoot to take the rest of the creatures out.

When they were certain that every one of them were either dead or incapacitated, Harry and Sirius retransformed into their human selves and joined the rest of the gang, who was now surrounding a pale Ron.

Hermione was crying over him and hitting him on the chest hysterically. "Ron! You stupid idiot! That was the most imbecile move you could ever have done!"

Dumbledore took the crying girl by the shoulders and she turned around to cry into the old wizard's robes.

"It's alright Miss Granger. Mister Weasley will be alright after a good rest. Madam Pomfrey will fix him right up."

Severus opened his thick robes and shoved a vial of potion into the shaking redhead's hands. "Drink this, Weasley. It's a Blood-replenishing potion. Nothing like this would have happened if you all did not decide to act like courageous little Gryffindor heroes! Unfortunately I do not have any potion on myself right now to help stop the infection the Nundu's breath caused on Weasley's arm. We'll have to be quick and get the Healers," he admonished severely before being interrupted by Minerva, who shot him a 'I will take care of this' look.

The quartet lowered their heads, now prepared for their punishment.

Harry sighed and rubbed his throbbing head. "At least now they know what it's like to fight in these kinds of situations. I doubt they'll make the same mistake twice."

Remus put a hand on the green eyed boy's shoulder in concern. "You'll have to get Poppy to look at your head; you hit the tree pretty hard, Harry."

The boy threw a thankful look to Remus when the man used a mild numbing and healing charm to help.

Sirius was just happy that his Godson was alright as he watched the other Order members and the Gryffindor four walk back to the castle.

Harry wandlessly Accioed his Firebolt from the forest and re-shrunk it. "I wouldn't want to be in Ron's shoes right now. I don't know about

the others' parents but Molly Weasley will chew Ron out just after her infamous hug-of-death," Harry deadpanned.

Sirius and Remus chuckled weakly. "Come on, let's go back to Hogwarts. Staying outside like this is no good anyway. We'll ask Hagrid to dispose of the rest of the creatures," Sirius muttered.

Harry snorted. "I'll see to it that Aragog and his family be alert if Hagrid encounters a few 'problems'. Let's just hope that he doesn't decide that Nundus and Manticores are cute little company animals and decides to keep them. Norbert and Fluffy come to mind..."

The two older men could only nod in desperation at Hagrid's...tendencies. Harry was too right.

My god, is that an update?! Yes it is! (And it was about time, too...)

I now have more than 3000 reviews! WOW! Thanks to my numerous supporters! -tears- You guys keep me going with your encouraging reviews. I know I haven't updated in a while but you know, I have a life too, beside fanfiction-writing... Like work, sleep, work, take some time to be with my friends, paint, work...did I mention work? Oh, and sleep too...Because my work schedule includes day, evening and night shifts all in one (not-so-neat) package, I need lots of sleep...Anyway...

You should know by now that I intend to finish WWM even if the updates are coming in slower than the usual. I never forget about you all and I never forget about the story. It's just taking me more time to put my ideas onto paper (and the computer).

So thanks again for your patience and I hope that this action-filled chapter (which is 20 pages long, by the way) was enough to satiate you for the moment!

Take care you guys, and review! Those who don't like the story, well, don't read! Anyway if you don't like it then why are you still here at the 30th chapter?! Hah! I want no useless flames!

Eternal Cosmos

Ps: thanks to Hitora-Gin for pointing the Map error! I saw to it quickly in this chapter! I re-read the chapters I write but sometimes I just don't see things like that.

Chapter 31 : The Black Army

“So there’s been some complications after all...”

The mood was rather dim at the moment. Molly Weasley was crying silently in her husband’s arms and their flock of children kept trying to reassure her.

Madam Pomfrey was looking at them with a silent, yet supportive gaze while Sirius and Remus stayed away, shielding Harry from their view, or was it the contrary?

Harry kept looking towards the bed Ron was currently sleeping in, a blackened arm heavily rolled up in healing potions and bandages.

Severus himself had prepared the potions administered by St-Mungo’s and Hogwarts’ healers but they had underestimated the powers of a Nundu’s breath.

At least they had prevented Ron’s death.

Harry knew inside him that it was the redhead’s fault for being in this position, but he was still feeling somewhat at fault. Remus gazed at Harry’s sad face and then at Sirius pleadingly. The Animagus took a shuddering breath and put both hands on his Godson’s shoulders, turning him around and enveloping him in a loose hug, as if he wanted to shield the young man from the sleeping Gryffindor and the crying family.

“It wasn’t your fault.”

“...I know.”

“The four of them didn’t listen to Dumbledore’s orders and decided to go out by themselves when they were aware that danger was lurking.”

“...I know.”

“You don’t have to blame yourself for anything.”

“...I know...but if I’d just been more careful-”

Remus and Sirius shared a look and walked Harry out of the Infirmary silently without the Weasley family noticing. Once they were out they marched straight back to their chambers, ignoring the students’ curious looks as they passed.

Sirius sighed and nearly pushed Harry down on the sofa.

“Listen Harry, and listen good. You’ve been putting way too much strain on yourself these past few days-”

“More like the past few months since he arrived here” Remus muttered under his breath.

Sirius shot him a look and the Werewolf lifted his hands in surrender, leaving the room.

“Harry, I know you’re upset about what happened to Ronald but he had it coming. You know he’s not the same Ron Weasley you knew. He wasn’t trained properly and hasn’t been gallivanting away in Hogwarts like you did when you were younger. No children here were ever subjected to such grave matters. He went out on his own volition, End. Of. Story.”

“But what if I hadn’t come outside? Maybe-”

Sirius put a digit on his Godson’s mouth to stop him from arguing. “If you hadn’t been there what? Maybe he would have been fine, maybe he would have died. Nobody knows what would have happened. It’s over. You took the decision you knew was right and for it I’m eternally grateful. Ron’s not dead, Harry. We just don’t know if he’ll ever be able to use that arm again. Let him worry about the consequence to his action; you worry about what you will have to do very soon. I believe in you, kid. In the short time we’ve been together, I feel as if I’ve known you all my life. Gods, Harry, you feel just like a son to me,

the son I've never had. I don't want to take James' place away but darn it..."

Harry stopped his Godfather's speech by hugging him tightly.

"Sirius..." the green eyed boy's voice was strangely hushed.

"In the other world...I've never been loved by mom's sister or her family. The closest thing I had to base myself on what a family could feel like was with the Weasleys. But...but when you came in my life...I finally felt what it was like to have a family. With you and Remus...But when I lost you...I can't...I won't be able to live through it if I lose you again. You're just like the father I wished I had as a kid."

Sirius returned Harry's hug, making his darned best not to let his tears spill, to be strong for the boy. It was just a matter of time before war would fall amongst them like a sledgehammer, destroying everything they had worked so hard to build. He wanted to say so much to his Godson but had so little time!

"I don't want to intrude in this –heartfelt- conversation but-"

Sirius and Harry startled and backed away from each other, doing their best not to show how deeply their conversation had moved them. Remus chuckled silently at their vain attempt and, trying to enlighten the atmosphere, he levitated a piece of parchment to Harry, who took it with a puzzled expression.

"What is it, Remus?"

He read the first few lines and did a double take, reading them again. His eyes got bigger as he continued to read the rest, hope shining in them.

Remus and Sirius looked at each other with uncertainty, and then at the black haired boy now sitting with a numb expression etched on his face.

“We know now’s probably not the best time,” Sirius started,

“And we know you’re thinking as yourself as being an independent adult and all,” Remus continued,

“but once all this shit is over, which by the way we WILL CERTAINLY survive...well...that is...”

“What Sirius is trying to say in his so eloquent way is that once this is all over we would like to adopt you as our own and we would like you to live with us OMPH!”

“YES!!!” Harry cried out and jumped on Remus before the man had any time to finish his phrase.

Sirius was overjoyed and laughed at his friend’s predicament. “Seriously, I don’t know why we were even scared of asking him this. That adoption paper has been sitting on my desk picking up dust for a month now.”

Indeed, even if he was nearing his eighteenth birthday Harry was still a child somehow, deep inside. He had never really had a normal childhood (as normal as a young wizard’s childhood can be, especially to one boy such as Harry Potter) and the absence of parents to take good care of him had left Harry a little too starved for attention. The attention Sirius and Remus now vowed to bestow on the boy as often as they could.

‘Now if only Voldemort didn’t exist...’ Sirius thought darkly, but he didn’t let it show on his face when Remus and Harry were having such a good time.

‘We’ll get through this together, as a family.’ He smiled.

Harry and Remus smiled back.

A family. Now that sounded really nice.

.....

“Master.”

“My Lord.”

“Voldemort.”

Cunning and merciless red eyes gazed at the army of men, dead, undead or still very alive in front of him. All here to serve him, below him and his power. His chest swelled in superiority and arrogance. His Death Eaters were bowing to him, on their knees, like little sheep waiting to be led towards the greenest field they had ever laid eyes upon, or in their case a world full of hate of their own making.

His followers of always, powerful in their own right but too coward to express their disdain to the world alone, needing a leader to guide them. ‘A little herd of sheep indeed.’ He raised an eyebrow but stayed silent, seated in his throne like chair, above the assembly, on a balcony of his mansion.

From everywhere in the world they had answered his call. He was particularly proud of his new recruits from Durmstrang. The death of Igor Karkarov had been just they needed to get motivated, it seemed, even if the man’s death hadn’t been planned.

His eyes narrowed.

The crowd in front of him fidgeted.

‘Damn you, Nagini! Why?!’

He tightened his hold on his armrest but showed no other outward malice. No, now simply wasn’t the time.

His Inner Circle kept aside, silent and proud. The new recruits blended in the crowd with the other Death Eaters from all over the world.

Magical creatures were kept at bay in another secure part of his mansion, deadly and cunning things they are.

His gaze strained to both left and right, where the Werewolves and Vampires were currently standing, seemingly not impressed by the size of the army. Or maybe they were too preoccupied to eye each other warily to even care.

‘Hum, the Werewolvesss and Vampiresss never did get along quite well becaussse of that age-old feud between both Main Housesss...’

Even so, Voldemort could consider himself lucky to even have the few of them on his side. Most having decided at the last minute not to participate in the upcoming War because of the loss dealt with the death of Greyback and his dignitaries and, of course, the total massacre of five Master Vampires at the hands of the Order and most particularly the fire-breathing Guardian of Gringotts.

He had managed to acquire two particularly vicious Dragons held, of course, in cages behind his domain. He was rather proud of them too, since such creatures were rather...hard to obtain. Too bad he couldn't have Gringotts' also, but at least the Goblins refused its use to even Dumbledore.

Hard to beat but not particularly intelligent, the Mummies and Zombies were kept in his always useful dungeon; decrepit, insalubrious, humid and very well furnished in torture devices and whatnot...mostly toys he could use on his victims to play a little when he couldn't sleep at night.

Hey, even a Dark Lord has his mojo!

Even if far away he didn't have to strain his gaze to see a dozen Giants making camp and lighting fires with the dead trees littering everywhere in Little Hangleton. Less than he had imagined having, but it was a dozen more than Dumbledore. The rest hadn't wanted to put their families at risk, especially with the new threat. ‘Hm, we'll see what I will do to those who refused me after I crush my enemies and this...this –boy-!’

And, he always had his Dementors. He let them feed so much in the neighbouring town that they managed to reproduce to a more than acceptable number.

The silence was starting to make everyone fidget. Little Hangleton wasn't used to such silence; it made the town even more eerie without the screams.

"Bellatrix! Malfoy! See to it that everyone follows the plan. I don't want to see anyone left behind," the Dark Lord finally spoke up with a regal and calm voice.

Both nodded and bowed lowly, Malfoy more stiffly than Bellatrix, whose eyes showed bloodlust bordering the lines of insanity.

Everyone stiffened and kneeled when Voldemort finally stood from his throne and pointed his wand towards his throat, not even bothering to speak up the incantation out loud. A simple thought of 'Sonus' did the trick.

"TOMORROW WILL BE THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA! TOMORROW, WE GO TO WAR! SPARE NO ONE! KILL TO YOUR HEART'S CONTEMPT! DESTROY EVERYTHING IN YOUR WAY! BUT REMEMBER, THE POTTER BOY IS MINE! NOW LET'S BE ON OUR WAY TO HOGWARTS, HEADQUARTERS OF THE REBELS!"

The immense crowd cheered and dangerous spellwork lit the sky with eerie colors. The Dark Lord pointed his wand absently towards his throat and disappeared behind the balcony's door.

The troops began to assemble their things for the fateful day. A Dragon's roar echoed in the background, smoke visible behind the Riddle Mansion. Everyone was high-strung; the Death Eaters tried as hard as they could to stop the Werewolves and Vampires from attacking each other, promising a great bloodbath tomorrow.

Yes, for that is what it would be.

High up on the sixth floor, Sirius and Remus were watching Harry have a three-way spar with Orion and Mathias. Bane and Firenze had joined the two older men after a rough hour of training together and were now talking quietly with the Werewolf and Animagus.

Orion and Mathias nearly decapitated Harry when the boy suddenly stopped in mid-swing and froze, the sword of Godric Gryffindor shining in the light the room provided for them.

Sirius and Remus were up in an instant but Harry had already blinked back into the world of awareness. His green eyes bore a hole into Sirius' own and the man transformed into a Grim-like dog. It ran out of the Room of Requirement as fast as its huge paws would allow.

The Gargoyle guarding the Headmaster's office, sensing trouble, jumped aside as soon as the dog came into view. The door to Dumbledore's office was kicked open and Sirius marched in, not even minding the Order reunion currently going on. Snape opened his mouth to protest but his arch-enemy beat him to the bush and made everyone shut up with one simple word;

“Tomorrow.”

It's finally coming in the next chapter, which should be mighty longer than this one! YAY! I want to thank everyone who is still reading this and reviewing, you guys are like my salvation (still going strong with more than 3000 reviews!). AND! I received an email to tell me that I had been nominated for The Goblet awards in HP fanfiction in the AU section. I was like Oo COOL! It's just an honour to be nominated, so thanks for those who voted for WWM.

Also, I don't want you all to kill me because of what I've done to Ron. Don't worry, he'll have his moment too, I'm not excluding him out of the War just yet. And I hope that those who thought that Remus, Sirius and Harry were being to “mushy” with each other are reassured that Harry just needs more attention than the normal young man. They just like being cuddly a little more than the normal family...after all, they're not so normal. (Grins)

Everybody take care!

Eternal Cosmos

Chapter 32: At last

Last time

High up on the sixth floor, Sirius and Remus were watching Harry have a three-way spar with Orion and Mathias. Bane and Firenze had joined the two older men after a rough hour of training together and were now talking quietly with the Werewolf and Animagus.

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“Tomorrow.”

After Dumbledore reigned in the exclamations of dread and frightened shouts, he turned towards Sirius and looked at him straight in the eyes. “Are you certain? Do you know any details of how or when exactly he will attack?”

“And what kind of army we will be facing?” Minerva anxiously added.

Sirius shook his head. “I didn't ask Harry any details. I just came here as fast as I could when he looked at me with those eyes...”

“It’s way too soon! We will never be ready in time! Tomorrow!” Wailed Molly Weasley. “What about my son! Or the other people in the infirmary? And the younger children?!”

“We won’t be getting anything done if we stay here wallowing in our misery!” Sirius snapped, effectively shutting the Weasley matriarch up. “I came here as fast as I could just to deliver the news! Now, do whatever you want but I suggest we make haste and prepare!”

“The mutt is right. We have to hurry. If the Dark Lord is already ready to attack, we will have to stop whatever he will be throwing at us,” Severus cut all wayward train of thought stiffly.

“Right...Right. Sirius, go back to Harry and ask him if it is possible to get more information. Now Minerva...”

Sirius didn’t hear the rest of Dumbledore’s orders; he was already out the door as soon as he received his.

.....

The evening was spent preparing for the invasion and strengthening the wards. Dinner was a silent affair with no one in the mood to laugh. The younger children were terrified and their parents were trying their best to reassure them, with little success.

Neither Sirius, Remus nor Harry showed up to eat, which made more than a few people very nervous even with Dumbledore and the Aurors in the Great Hall. The Weasley family had decided to dine in the infirmary with Ron, who was very aggravated to learn he would not be able to join the fight on the grounds because of his arm.

Meanwhile, Harry was devising his own plans in the Room of Requirements.

“So you want us to push as many Death Eaters as we can in an enclosed area?” Stratos of the Blue Clan asked softly.

Harry acquiesced. "Yes. I know it will be difficult in all the chaos the attack will no doubt cause but if it works it could considerably reduce their numbers, meaning less stray spells to dodge. Magical creatures are somewhat predictable. Take a Dragon, for example. It flies so you have to duck; it breathes fire so you have to either shield, dodge or use an intense freezing spell... that or target its eyes from the beginning. Death Eaters, on the other side, are unpredictable. You never know which spell and strategy they will use, if they don't go directly for the Killing Curse. Their mental state makes them more dangerous than any magical creatures, in my opinion, because they are able to think in their own warped way. You understand all that?"

Sirius, Remus and the Centaurs nodded.

"Good. When I feel the time is right I will unleash Salazar's wrath upon them in a surprise attack. I will then let him do as he sees fit."

"Will it not kill us with its deadly eyes?" A random Centaur asked out of the assembled group.

Remus and Sirius shared a look. "The one who spoke is right."

Said Centaur approached after being called forth by Jihl, one of the Council Members and present Leader of the Black Centaur Clan.

"I am Argos, Warrior of the Black Clan."

Remus continued after the presentations. "Argos is right. Unleashing Salazar is not a bad idea, per se, but how will you make sure that he doesn't unintentionally kill one or many of our fighters?"

Harry smirked confidently. "Don't worry about Salazar. I already gave him his instructions."

"Do you really think Voldemort has Dragons?" enquired Perseus, one of Mathias's friend. Harry's mouth set in a grim line. "I wouldn't put it past him to be able to get some. He's not a Dark Lord for nothing. And I'm sure he has more tricks up his sleeves."

Altair put a strong hand on Harry's shoulder and squeezed lightly. "Were you not able to See into his mind or See through his eyes?"

"All I can see and feel now is an intense need to kill. But you have to remember that Master Gambitt accepted to lend us one of his Dragons since Gringotts has now three of them. He took in consideration that we all but saved their lives and their bank. Charlie Weasley also sent a letter to his friends in Romania. I just hope they will help and if so, arrive here in time."

The reddish warrior nodded, satisfied with the answer.

"Do you think He will have the support of the Werewolf and Vampire communities? What about other Magical Creatures? Or Giants?" Strauss asked out of the blue while fiddling with his scabbard.

Harry sighed.

Remus put a hand on his shoulder and the black haired boy let the man talk. "I also tried to make my contribution by writing to the Werewolf tribe. I know for a fact that Voldemort has lost more than half of the Werewolf effective he had because of the loss of Greyback. The rest of the community completely isolated themselves from him and the war. They won't help us. Only the most bloodthirsty of them still accepted to fight, more so for their own personal reasons. As for the Vampires, I would think the same thing happened since they lost those members who were at Diagon Alley."

The green eyed boy nodded. "I thought so too. I've faced Vampires before and the ones at Diagon Alley were by far above average. I think some of them were Masters. That couldn't be good for Tom's liaison with their tribe. And at least tomorrow's not a full moon so the Vampires won't be at their peak of power and the humans won't be able to transform into Werewolves; they'll only be stronger and faster than us by a margin."

Remus and Sirius were sharing the same opinion, until Remus frowned in thought. "But what if some of them are of Greyback's calibre and are able to transform without the full moon?"

Mathias shivered. "To transform without the aide of the full moon? It would be suicide then to attack such a beast driven by bloodlust."

"We'll deal with it if we get to it. For now let's concentrate of the matter at hand. If Tom has any more Magical Creatures we'll have to leave them in Aragog's good care. We also have the Thestrals for good measure and at least one Dragon. Then we have the House Elves and Fawkes, Dumbledore's Phoenix. Salazar knows what to do already and there's an Ashwinder in the Forbidden Forest waiting to burn things." Harry's confident expression calmed the assembly of Centaurs in front of him.

"You are right. We will deal with things as they come," was the wise comment of Isaac, another elder though not leader, of the Black clan.

Harry nodded to him and held hands with his good friend Orion before letting go and joining his Godfathers. "You have to get some sleep, all of you. It won't do you good to be tired and hurt from training too hard. I look forward to do battle with you all tomorrow. And remember," he added as an afterthought, "Dumbledore, although some of you may not like him, probably also has some allies that we don't know of."

They all nodded and Harry smiled softly, closing the door behind him. Sirius and Remus followed him silently back to Harry's quarters where they would all stay for the night. "You told them to sleep. Would YOU sleep in a moment like this?" Sirius muttered.

Harry grimaced. "Not a chance."

The Animagus snorted. "I thought so."

Remus stayed silent.

.....

The following day came way too soon to many people's opinion. The youngest and eldest that couldn't fight were sent either in a secure common room or to the infirmary. Many wards were put on place to insure that no Death Eater would be able to get in, though they would not stop Voldemort in the long run should he win.

Every person who could fight joined on Hogwarts' grounds after a solid breakfast, far from the castle but not far enough to reach it should the enemy pierce their defences. Everyone was tense.

Harry, Sirius and Remus stayed on the Centaurs' side for a while, waiting for Voldemort to finally show up.

"When do you think they will attack? Tonight?" Argos asked, hooves thumping the ground in impatience.

"I can't be sure. Night time would be best but I don't think Tom will be willing to wait anymore. We all have to stay alert."

He and Dumbledore eyed each other from afar but the old man returned to his post, telling each group what to do.

The House-Elves were all rallied together, knives, forks and sharp culinary objects held tightly in their little hands. Harry could almost see Dobby at the front, ready as ever to do battle for what he believed in. Unfortunately Dobby was still under Malfoy's command; Harry would just have to find a way around that.

A shadow blocked the sun for a few moments. Everyone looked up to see Fawkes flying away, probably sent for reconnaissance. 'Good idea, Headmaster. At least we'll know when to expect them. Everyone's way too high-strung right now,' Harry thought with a grim look.

Some students sat down on the ground, their legs shaking too much from nervousness at the long wait. A couple of hours went by and some people started to relax when a small shadow blocked the sun again. They got up slowly. "Fawkes is here!" Denis Creevey pointed at the sky.

Harry looked up, squinting his eyes at the sunlight, but they immediately narrowed when the shadow only got bigger and bigger. "GET UP AND TAKE YOUR WANDS OUT YOU FOOLS! THAT'S A DRAGON!!!" he screamed in anger at their carelessness and got ready to throw some serious spellwork.

The shadow finally became distinguishable from the sun's rays and surely, an Antipodean Opaleye roared and spat a large fireball at them.

Screams of terror erupted from everywhere and everyone started to run away from the threat. "STOP SCURRYING AROUND LIKE A BUNCH OF PEA-BRAINED MORONS AND USE WATER SPELLS!" Harry snarled, his wand already emitting a dangerous red glow.

Remus and Sirius were already behind him. Dumbledore and his Order had also thought of this. After a mighty shout of "AGUAMENTI MAXIMUS!," thick jets of water coming from all directions reassembled together and slammed forcefully into the oncoming fireball. Smoke emitted from the impact, as well as a loud and ominous sizzling sound.

The pressure actually pushed them back, their feet sliding in the ground and creating indentations in the earth. Harry immediately thought of a feet-sticking charm while Remus and Sirius, too concentrated on their spellcasting, gave thankful looks to Perseus and Major who held them in position.

The attack finally receded but before they could take a breather the Dragon roared again and swooped down on them, razor sharp claws and teeth at the ready. 'Shit! I didn't think Tom would use a Dragon so soon!'

Nagini hissed a warning on his arm and tightened her hold on him.

He vaguely heard cries of "Arresto Momentum!" and "Petrificus Totalus!" somewhere in the melee but the spells merely slowed the Dragon's descent until they just broke.

The Centaurs yelled a war cry and they started throwing spears and arrows at the huge beast. Though some came in contact with the Dragon's belly, most of them merely rebounded off the tough scaly skin.

Harry pointed his wand at the swooping beast and concentrated while other Wizards threw everything they had at it.

“SECTUMSEMPRA!” The nasty spell whirled in the Dragon's direction and it snarled angrily when its snout was hit. ‘Damn! I wanted to hit the eyes!’

Snape momentarily froze upon hearing his personal creation being uttered but quickly understood Harry's intention.

“Everyone! Try hitting its eyes!”

The Order members quickly followed Harry and Snape's example until one of the stray spells hit its mark. The Dragon let out a roar mixed with a screech that froze their blood. Nobody moved while it flew around shaking its head roughly. But instead of flying away, it got even madder and sniffed around before growling and preparing another attack.

“Wasn't that supposed to stop it?!” Hermione cried out in fright. “It's not acting like it's supposed to be! That wasn't in the book!”

She was panicking and shaking all over before McGonagall actually slapped her on the cheek. “Calm down Miss Granger and use your head! We're not in a book! It isn't a story! This is war! Now use the knowledge you've gained instead of panicking like that!” the usually suave teacher screeched.

Hermione whimpered but nodded in resolution. A couple of Gryffindors and Ravenclaws backed her up, deciding to stay in a group.

The Dragon targeted them and Harry made a split-second decision. “ACCIO FIREBOLT!”

Before the beast could fire upon them Harry took flight, ignoring Sirius and Remus' cries, and zoomed past the enraged animal, throwing hexes and curses at it to divert its attention from the people below. It worked magnificently but now he had to concentrate on staying as far away as he could from it.

He zoomed around, almost a repeat of his fourth year, trying to trick the Dragon into getting stuck somewhere or hitting the cliffs. But for a blind creature the bugger could certainly keep track well enough with him. With a powerful flap of its wings the Opaleye got close enough to hit him. Harry swore and veered aside swiftly. The Dragon heard him and changed direction. It opened its maw and prepared to fire, literally.

Harry looked back at it in anger. His right cheek and torso started to sting but before he could ask himself why a loud roar echoed in the air and another Dragon slammed into Harry's pursuer. The black haired boy stopped, blinked, and then smirked when he got a clear view of his helper. It was a Romanian Longhorn, more particularly a Goblin riding it on a thick leather saddle. The promised help from Gringotts had finally arrived.

While the blind Opaleye regained its senses, the Goblin said something in Gobbledegook and the Longhorn flew to Harry. "You are Master Harry Potter, I presume? I am Goblin-Warrior Gramdam. I will be taking care of this menace, you did well blinding it. We heard that Voldemort had another Dragon. We don't know when he will be using it, though. But help from Charlie Weasley's friends from Romania will be coming. They are flying here so I don't know when they will be arriving," the small creature said in a clipped tone.

The Opaleye started to sniff around for them so Gramdam gave an order to his beast in Gobbledegook. The Longhorn spat three consecutive fireballs at the other Dragon, stalling it.

Harry nodded his thanks for the information to the Master Goblin. It nodded and then sneered. "I will take care of this beast; you can go back to the castle. But with this act consider our debt towards you repaid. Once I finish this mission I am going back to Gringotts."

“It’s more than enough help, Master Gramdam. Thank you.” Harry nodded stiffly and sped away, already knowing that the Goblins would never have given more help than this anyway. But at least they had one less Dragon to worry about.

.....

When he came back to the school, its grounds had already turned into a battlefield.

He noticed Parvati Patil sitting on the ground in fright –more like heard her scream in front of her worst fear- before her sister and some Ravenclaws started to shoot fire spells at the Mummies. Their bandages soon caught fire and the undead creatures screeched madly before trying to stop turning into ash.

Deeming them able to defend themselves at the moment he landed beside a concerned Sirius, who, after seeing Harry, looked immensely relieved. Together they evaded a stray Killing Curse and started to throw their own curses at the enemy.

“Where’s –FRIGUS!- Remus?”

Sirius winced when Harry’s current victim, one of Voldemort’s Death Eaters, started to scream in fright and claw at himself as if trying to push something back. The Death Eater’s mouth started to emit a little fog and he turned blue as if caught by hypothermia before keeling over, dead.

“I don’t know!”

The Animagus gasped when Harry tackled him to the ground, a red jet of light passing straight where he’d been standing.

“Thanks Harry! IMPEDIMENTA!”

Both got up again and started to fire back. “Last time I saw him he was straying towards the Order! GENI RETRORSUM!” Sirius’

opponent, a Zombie, found his knees turning backwards and it collapsed. "CONFLO MAXIMUS!" The creature started to swell and it blew up like a balloon, catching another one unawares.

At the moment no one was really winning. Harry noticed the Centaurs rallying together and motioned for Sirius to continue fighting, explicitly ordering him not to die. The man smiled grimly but nodded nonetheless before disappearing in the fray, probably going to help the students in need.

Orion caught up with Harry mid-way and the blond Centaur let the human ride his back so they could get to the Forbidden Forest faster, where the Centaurs had already vanished into. No one really noticed them going into the dark forest, too preoccupied with their current opponents.

Harry smirked darkly when he saw the captured Death Eaters, his green eyes becoming darker. Some he recognized; students from Hogwarts, for example, and some even coming from Durmstrang. He saw Dolohov in the melee, being held by two Centaurs because he was trying to free himself rather ferociously. "Potter! My Master will kill you!" the man said crazily, sneering and spitting on the half-beasts holding him.

Harry stayed seated on Orion and gave Dolohov such a frigid blood-lusting smile that the man actually took a step back before holding his ground again.

The sounds of war were echoing strongly in the background but it didn't phase Harry one bit.

"Dolohov, where's your Master now? Hiding? How come he isn't on the battlefield, risking his life like everyone else? You know you're disposable; if you die, another stupid sheep will take your place!" Harry cackled when the man screamed in anger at him. It wouldn't do him any good though; his wand had already been snapped by the Centaurs.

The other twenty Death Eaters or so started to get agitated at the mention of their Lord but a few ropes and arrows later they 'calmed down'.

"What are you going to do with us?" One of the dark men sneered.

Harry ignored the question and addressed the Centaurs. "My dear friends, your time has come to rejoin the fight."

They nodded and pushed the captured group away roughly, coming to a stop beside Orion, seemingly waiting for something. The Death Eaters, curious but uncaring of the reason as to why they had been unexpectedly freed, started to run deeper into the forest to escape.

Harry chuckled and the other Centaurs ran out of the forest with renewed enthusiasm.

"Sssalazar! Lunch issss served."

The runaway group only heard a deep rumble under their scurrying feet before a dark mass fell upon them.

Nagini hissed, diverting Harry's attention from the gurgled cries of agony, and the boy looked down to see a red gleam on the ground. "Red one, I was beginning to wonder where you were. Come with me, you may be of ussse."

Orion lowered himself slightly and Harry let the Ashwinder slither on his arm and secure itself around his wrist like a glowing bracelet. The magical snake lowered its scorching body temperature for the boy to tolerate without getting burned. "Always a pleasure to be of ssservice!"

"Let's go Orion."

"What about Salazar?"

"He'll come when summoned. He's my trump card, can't go exposing him yet can't I?"

Orion smirked, unsheathed his sword and positioned his shield before galloping out of the woodland with a war cry. Harry tightened his hold on his friend's flank and, following Orion's actions, unsheathed Gryffindor's sword.

You really had to stop blinking if you wanted to discern friend from enemy: people, creatures and undead were fighting everywhere, bodies were littering the ground and staining the grass red.

Bringing his sword down, Harry started hacking away any enemy who crossed his and Orion's path. He urged his friend to gallop faster and both literally impaled Crabbe Sr. and Jr. at the same time, right in front of frightened fifth year Hufflepuffs and Slytherins, who got splattered in blood. "Don't just stand there to be cursed! Use your wands!" Harry snapped at the group before Orion galloped away.

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On his side, Remus wasn't faring as well. He was fighting alongside Dumbledore and a couple of Order members but the sheer number of Zombies they had to eradicate was phenomenal. The Killing Curse stopped them for a moment but being undead they couldn't really die. The golden-eyed man had even seen a poor House-Elf being devoured by the flesh-eating creatures while trying to defend them.

They were extremely resistant to ordinary curses and using so many high-powered spells needed more energy than they dared use in case something more horrible appeared. Dumbledore, Flitwick and Moody, finally fed up, combined their forces and used the strongest blasting charm they knew. The result was rather ear-shattering, the explosion it produced a proof of these three men's skill.

The Zombies at the front exploded in a shower of reeking dead tissues and powdered bones, but the ones at the far back were simply catapulted away and got up again, to the spellcasters' great misfortune.

A couple of minutes later a dozen Centaurs had joined them and were hacking away heads and limbs, to the Order's agreeable

surprise. The Wizards redoubled their efforts and mentally thanked Harry for getting such skilled allies. Suddenly the Centaurs helping them just ran away from the Zombies.

Snape used his favourite creation to tear one of the resilient undead to pieces, sneering all the while. "What good are the half-beasts for if they just run away from what they can't deal with?!"

But, unlike what they thought, the Centaurs hadn't run away to rejoin the fighting mass for that reason. Xiomara and Rosmerta yelled and almost literally cursed Harry when he sped by them on Orion's back in the remaining Zombies' direction, a dark grin etched on his normally calm face.

Three other Centaurs sped past the two women and joined their comrades, helping Orion push the rabid creatures together. Getting up on their hind legs, they gave it their all, also using their swords to cut any offending, bandage covered limbs getting in their way. Orion looked at his friends in surprise but he was happy to see they were still alive, if only a little ruffled.

Mathias, Vega and Strauss looked back at him confidently, smirks etched on their faces.

"We couldn't let you have all the fun alone now could we?" Vega said while bashing one of the creatures in the head.

"After all, we don't want you to have all the merit, you noble steed!" Mathias joked.

If Orion wasn't so occupied assembling the Zombies together without getting killed he would have slapped the reddish Centaur on the back of his head for joking on the fact that he was letting Harry ride him like one would a common horse.

"Okay guys! Get back" Harry urged stiffly once he deemed the enemy packed together tightly enough.

Rosmerta thought she saw something glowing on Harry's arm disappear into the mass but she blamed it on her imagination. She shouldn't have, because as soon as Orion and his three friends were far away enough from the threat Harry hissed something in Parseltongue.

The Zombies all started to scream and screech when a big ball of flame encompassed them all. It was so hot even Harry had to erect a shield in order to protect himself from the intense heat. A couple of minutes later it was all over, the mass of undead had been reduced to ashes. Harry urged the blond Centaur to trot to the middle of the blackened pile of dust and he retrieved the exhausted Ashwinder. The boy's face was set into a serious expression and he didn't spare the Order a glance before the four Centaurs galloped away.

Rosmerta shared a look with Hooch while Sprout examined the ashes. "I thought those things were resilient to fire spells?" Rosmerta asked slowly, still looking around for possible enemies.

Sprout looked back at them. "If my eyes didn't deceive me then the animal in Harry's hands was an Ashwinder!"

Hooch nodded while a dawning look crossed Rosmerta's face. "Ah, a magical fire then. Way stronger."

A couple of Death Eaters sent some hexes in their direction. Vector was hit with a Jelly-Brain jinx before Alastor Moody cursed them with Cruciatus. Vector fell to the ground unconscious so Dumbledore used Levicorpus to put her out of harm's way. Unfortunately, Poppy Pomfrey was in the locked hospital wing with other patients and Hogwarts residents and they couldn't afford to transport all the wounded into the castle.

A sudden movement gained their attention and Remus cursed loudly. Voldemort had ordered another faction of his army to attack, and this time it was the Werewolves in human form. They were easily recognisable; most of them were dressed in shabby clothes and were just using their nails and teeth to make their way into the fighting mass of people and creatures.

“I’ll take care of them!” Remus snarled before he vanished in their direction.

“Remus! Wait! Albus, I’m going with him!” Minerva suddenly said, scurrying after the DADA teacher with a speed no one in school thought she possessed. Snape sent a look towards the Headmaster and followed his colleague, hexing every Death Eater getting in his way.

When Remus arrived, the Centaurs had already started to fight the raging humans. They were fast, and a couple of Centaurs unfortunately fell on the ground, vanquished, after being bitten and slashed in the stomach and legs. Councilman Stratos was one of the injured and was preparing to defend himself to the death when someone rammed into the oncoming Werewolf and tackled him to the ground.

Remus got up and snarled at the threat and if he’d been transformed his hackles would have been raised menacingly. He couldn’t completely transform as it were, but his nails and teeth elongated slightly and his eyes became a bright golden color.

The other Werewolf regained his senses and started to snarl back but stepped back in hesitation when he saw Remus, as if he recognized the teacher. The other Werewolves present also stepped backwards and merely slashed offending opponents away when they came too close of their group.

Many Wizards took this hesitation for granted and started to send binding spells at them, catching many Werewolves unawares.

“What’s going on?! Why are you hesitating you bunch of no-good bastards?!” A rough voice at the back snapped. A shabby looking man jumped at one of the offending Wizards and bit him savagely before tossing the hesitant pack away, making his way to the front. He gave a look over the cowering man before his sight stopped on Remus.

McGonagall and Snape finally reached the pack and levelled their wands dangerously towards them. The one whom they deemed the leader of this pack started to snarl at Remus after sniffing the air a few times. Remus snarled back and both were jumping at each other's throat in seconds, not giving Minerva and Severus enough time to get a clear shot at the leader.

"Why is Remus fighting like those animals?!" Minerva panicked, her wand moving right and left, trying to follow their movements. Snape took out a few bottles from his robes and before the other cowering Werewolves could do a thing he threw the bottle at them. It smashed on the ground and a thick grey smoke poured out. The group started to look around in confusion until they didn't quite know what to do about the two still engaged in battle.

Snape conjured a long thick rope and caught them all together. "Heh, Confusing Concoction," he explained to Minerva when she sent him a questioning look. A look of understanding passed on her face and she watched as Remus was thrown away by the bigger man. She cried in fright for Moony and was about to curse the other Werewolf when Snape stopped her. "Severus?! What? He needs help!"

"Let the wolf fight, Minerva. Apparently this one took Greyback's place as leader but who do you think is Greyback's true heir? Who do you think Greyback bit first?"

Minerva's eyes widened. "So the current leader is testing Remus? But they want to kill each other!"

"Of course! There cannot be two Alpha wolves in the same pack. I hope the mutt knows what he's doing."

They both watched the fighting duo from the corner of their eyes and resumed sending hexes at the enemy. A blond gleam caught the ex-Death Eater's eyes and he disappeared into the chaos, leaving McGonagall to fend for herself.

.....

Ron couldn't believe his eyes. He had thought war to be bloody, but not to this extent. AND to top it off his girlfriend was somewhere down there and he didn't know if she was alright or not. He was just stuck in the Infirmary, looking through one of the many windows his only way to get a good look at the happenings outside...and it bloody frustrated him to no ends. "I should be down there!"

A couple of first years jumped in fright at his sudden statement.

"Don't be daft, Mister Weasley." Pomfrey admonished him, "You're in no condition to fight with that arm of yours."

"But it's not even my wand arm! I could be fighting right now instead of sitting here and doing nothing!" he said, his face red in anger.

"Oh, shut up! I grow tired of hearing your whining! We could be assaulted at all times! Do you think we wanted to be stuck here with YOUR kind, and against our will?!" a thin woman with a long horse-like neck spat at the red headed boy in discontent.

Poppy rolled her eyes and told her to be quiet. Dumbledore had warned her that this muggle family would create problems if not kept in check, especially the whale-like man and his too thin wife.

Her, the sister of the beloved Lily Potter nee Evans?! Almost unthinkable!

But the boy got up and, to Poppy's utmost surprise, nodded to the young Weasley's statement. Petunia and Vernon looked completely horrified and tried to reign in their son but he got away from the bed they were sitting on, and they didn't want to get near the Wizards. They watched as their precious son stopped beside the redhead.

"He's right! I'm a boxing heavyweight champion and I want to fight too! It's our lives at stake here!"

Hestia, who had finally awakened but had retreated to a shadowed corner, looked at the muggle in disdain. "Fat lot of good your supposed title will do if they breach Hogwarts' safety wards," she

muttered darkly under her breath. "And what do you want to do? We're in a high tower and have no means to reach them!" She then said out loud.

Dudley's mouth opened and closed. "But you're free- I mean W-wizards! You know m-magic!"

Petunia whimpered at hearing the doomed words and Vernon nearly went a not so lovely shade of puce.

"Yeah! He's right! If -we- can't reach them, we'll just let objects reach them!" Ron said in a sudden epiphany.

Everyone looked at him as if he was crazy. He sighed and looked upwards as if silently asking the Heavens to help him get through this. "Come on guys! Think! He said it," Ron said, surprising Dudley when the redhead pointed at him, "we're goddamn Wizards! We can still use magic! We know hurling hexes and levitation charms! We just have to use the stuff that's in this room and throw it at the enemy down there! I'm certain Madam Pomfrey knows a good Sight-Enhancement charm so we can see our targets better and there are a lot of potions here that can be harmful!"

Poppy gave him the evil eye. "Don't you dare think about desecrating my Infirmary!" she screeched, but stopped with a look from the youngest Weasley boy.

At first the idea seemed farfetched but the more they thought about it the more it actually made sense. The first years and a few older injured Wizards who could still use magic all gathered in groups around the windows and Poppy used the eye charm on them, accepting to help. After all, Hogwarts was also her home.

She motioned for the right potions to take to the ones who couldn't fight and they started to work in chains; they took the potions and brought them to those who could use the levitation charm to throw at the enemy.

Ron started with a few hurling hexes of his own and went on with a few more complicated spells he had learned in the Great Hall at the last minute, mentally thanking Professor Black and Lupin. "Shit!"

Dudley looked down as Ron seemed to spot something on the battlefield. "Hermione!"

Ah! His girlfriend, then, the muggle boy deduced.

She and a group of students were surrounded by men wearing deep black robes. Many of the kids with her were down and at the enemy's mercy.

The boy looked around frantically for something big enough to throw and his gaze narrowed on one of the empty beds. He shrugged. "Hey you!"

Ron sent him a quick look. "The name's Ron, not you!"

"Dudley. Hey Ron, do you think we can use this to save your friends?"

Ron gazed back at Dudley and then at the bed he was pointing at. His eyes met the muggle boy's and they smirked. "Can do! Bring it here!"

Dudley nodded eagerly and tried to lift the bed. "Damn it's heavy! Dad! Stop sulking and help me get this bed to Ron!"

Vernon looked affronted.

"Damn it dad! Don't you want to hurt those Wizards?" Dudley said coyly, knowing that his dad was all for this.

The man didn't need another incentive and hurried to his son's side. Together they lifted the bed and brought it to Ron, who managed to levitate it out the window. A couple of people in the room stopped to stare at the levitating bed.

The redhead was about to launch it but Poppy put a hand on his shoulder and, with a wave of her wand, she enlarged it at least three times its normal size. "That'll teach them to hurt people! I may be a medic but I don't need to be treating patients day and night!"

Ron used the hurling hex and the bed was off. It took a few seconds and the Death Eaters surrounding the weary group were all splattered by the bed. It took Hermione and her friends another few seconds to blink at the bed, of all things to save them.

"What the?" She looked up when she heard a faint cheer and she gaped when she saw her boyfriend yelling and waving at them before he went back to sending things out the Infirmary windows with other people. She smiled and waved back, helping the injured get up. The group stared at the bed, looking very much out of place in the setting, but no one dared joke and they all went back to business, knowing somebody was watching their backs.

"Yesss!" Ron and Dudley clapped hands and partnered up.

Vernon looked quite content. "This isn't so bad. We even get to hurt them. Petunia dear! Bring me that stool over there!"

The woman sputtered nonsense but obeyed with a resolute expression.

.....

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled in amusement after seeing the 'prisoners' of the Infirmary fighting back. The flying bed certainly caught many people's attention before it finally crashed somewhere on the ground.

The old man looked up and sighed. The war wasn't over yet, not by a long shot. Not all of Voldemort's allies had shown up. The Light side still had some allies left of their own. But would they be of equal strength?

The Thestrals, now he was sure everyone could see, had begun to help by attacking the remaining Mummies and Zombies, sometimes even a stray Death Eater. And knowing their taste for fresh and bloody meat...

The sun was beginning to set, painting the sky a bloody shade of red and orange; they were growing tired and Albus feared the worse when the last rays of sunlight would withdraw.

“Albus!”

The old Headmaster turned to see his Deputy-Headmistress running towards him. She looked a little worse for wear but still in good shape to continue fighting.

“Ah, Minerva! I’m happy to see you survived. We lost Vector, Horace and dear Augusta Longbottom to the Death Eaters’ curses.”

The woman gasped and prayed silently before looking back at the bearded man. “Albus, I bear good news! Remus was able to kill the current leader of the Werewolf pack and now they agreed to help us! Apparently they didn’t quite like the fact that they had to fight alongside Vampires. But now Remus is unable to continue fighting. Sirius and Harry are with him and helping Remus get to safety.”

Dumbledore nodded. “Finally some good news. I’m also glad the boy is alright. But what I feared would happen unfortunately will. The sun has set. We may have killed and captured almost all the Death Eaters but what will we do with the Vampires? This is going to be difficult. They’re resilient to magic and are fast and silent killers. We better rally everyone who can still fight and tell them of the oncoming danger.”

Minerva nodded and, with the help of a few seventh year students, she did as told.

Meanwhile, Harry and Sirius helped the wobbling Remus get to safety in the Forbidden Forest. Orion limped slightly beside them but held his sword tightly, still able to continue fighting.

They had lost trace of Mathias, Vega and Strauss a while ago but had encountered Firenze, Bane, Altaïr and Thor on their way to the forest. They were guarding the bound prisoners while the others kept fighting.

Harry used Lumos to light a path in the darkness and Remus sighed when he finally sat down. Sirius made certain he was comfortable and Orion told them he would keep watch over their friend, to Harry's great appreciation. "Nagini, you ssstay with him. Your sssenssesss are ssharp and I'm counting on you to alert them of any incoming danger."

The great snake was then enlarged two times her normal size and she coiled around Remus and Orion, nodding her assent even though she looked displeased to see Harry leave her. The black haired boy hugged Remus tightly and nodded to Orion before starting to walk back out.

Remus sighed and created the faintest light with his wand just enough for them to see. They kept still and prayed for their friends' safety. But then they heard, more like felt, the ground rumble dangerously beneath them.

"Giants..." Orion whispered with a grim look.

Remus held the light but closed his eyes tightly. "Harry, Sirius..."

.....

Dumbledore and his army were already trying to stop the twelve Giants from advancing when Harry and Sirius joined them.

Jihl and Zargoth ran towards one, holding a thick rope between them. They evaded a huge hand coming their way that would surely have killed them if it had hit and the Giant fell on the ground with a loud boom when his feet got stuck in the rope. Hermione, Dean, Seamus and five others from Gryffindor put their wands together and used the most powerful paralyzing spell they knew. McGonagall joined them

because it was still moving, and then Bathsheba Babbling, the Ancient Runes teacher, used her knowledge to seal the Giant in a ward.

Many a time they had to duck not to get hit by a tree become clubbing bat. A good portion of the newly allied Werewolves were thrown aside when they tried to attack a particularly ferocious Giant and many of them did not get up afterwards.

“PROCELLOSUS VERTEX!” Harry’s wand started to emit a vicious red glow and his cheek started to burn again. He held his wand tightly and directed it towards the clear night sky.

Sirius threw a Cruciatus Curse at the Giant whom Harry was targeting before it could throw a sizeable rock at his Godson. Harry spared him a thankful look but stayed focused on his spellcasting.

Thick black clouds appeared in a swirling vortex in the sky before he made a slashing movement with his glowing wand toward his victim. An enormous tornado followed the move and descended directly upon the unsuspecting Giant. He actually lifted off of his big hairy feet and spun around many times before being catapulted away, landing brutally on another one of his comrades.

As soon as they hit the ground the tornado retracted and the sky swirled again to a clear midnight blue, leaving no trace of what happened and not even a trace of wind. Many people gaped in his direction but really didn’t have the time to comment on the impressive spell.

Harry let his arm fall and kneeled on the grass, panting a little and trying to regain some energy. He put a hand on his cheek when it stopped stinging, asking himself why it did that, but then he vaguely heard Sirius screaming at him before something landed roughly on him and held him down.

He heard many people screaming and yelling but he was a little too busy with the new arrival to be able to help them. The Vampire on top of him hissed menacingly and knocked Padfoot away when the dog tried to get him off the boy.

“Padfoot!” Harry turned his head towards his assailant and sneered but it didn’t have any effect except a tighter hold on his wrists. Long dark hair framed the Vampire’s face and ruby red eyes, not unlike Voldemort’s, gazed back at him with bloodlust. He had a strong jaw and was by far bigger than Harry, height-wise. If Harry wasn’t so desperate to get away from the tight hold he would have found the Vampire to be handsome, looking quite young and aristocratic. But the Wizard knew that he couldn’t let this façade fool him. “Get off of me!”

“Harry Potter, we meet at last,” the Vampire said in a hushed, enthralling voice. He gazed at Harry as if analyzing him, slowly taking in his vibrant and defiant green eyes, his struggling hands limply holding the red wand, before ending on an appetizing looking neck. The older man licked his lips and he bent down, taking in a big whiff of the boy’s neck. “Hmmm, what does your blood tastes like I wonder?”

Harry couldn’t help but look mystified. Here he was stuck on the ground with an army of Giants and Vampires running amuck around him and the ancient being above him was ignoring the danger of being squashed to death by a clumsy Giant’s foot just so he could have a taste of his blood!

The Vampire started to lick Harry’s neck when Harry blurted out the first thing that came to mind. “What’s your name?!”

The Vampire froze in mid-lick and crossed gaze with wide emerald eyes. Before the being had time to answer he gathered Harry in his arms and jumped away with an enviable agility. A Giant fell on the ground where they once stood, bleeding all over the place.

“Did you just save my life?” Harry asked, perplexed yet still wary.

The Vampire raised a perfectly sculpted eyebrow. “Voldemort wants you alive.” He explained, his lips puckering in disdain when pronouncing the Dark Lord’s name.

Harry huffed. "Looks to me like you have some reservations towards old Riddle. You DO know that he'll never hold onto his promises, don't you? Do you really think he'll let the Vampires be of equal status with him? You're just pawns on his chessboard heck! He's not even fighting right now so you know I'm right!"

The Vampire sneered and grasped his neck tightly, the other hand holding the boy's wand hand away. Harry's green eyes stayed rooted on the other man's, his mouth set in a firm line, absolutely confident in his own words.

"You are insolent." Sharp canines nipped at his neck yet Harry still didn't flinch.

But the Vampire had to withdraw and let go of the boy when a wayward Death Eater sent a Killing Curse at them. Harry reacted on instinct, not even taking in the fact that the culprit was in fact Mulciber, and with a wave of his hand an unknown spell zoomed towards the servant and decapitated him where he stood.

The Vampire stayed silent for a while with a contemplative look adorning his noble face, and then he looked up when the atmosphere changed.

Harry followed his gaze and cursed but levelled his wand at the dangerous Vampire nonetheless.

The older of the two merely smirked and started to back away, seemingly gliding on the air and disappearing in the darkness of the night. "Hey! Where are you going?!"

"You could have hurt me without your wand, little vizard. I wonder why you didn't?" A pause. "Aleksandr Mikhailov. That is what they call me. Now let us see what you can do, little vizard. The result of this war will maybe determine whose side we will take at the end. Maybe we meet again in more favourable circumstances or maybe I feast on your defeated body's blood. Do svidanja, Harry Potter."

The Vampire vanished in the chaos.

The air started to grow cold and fog appeared when Harry exhaled. He looked around; many bodies were littering the rapidly freezing ground. Some were still moving and Harry didn't think about the ones who didn't. There were three Giants left, a couple of Death Eaters still roaming about but quickly retreating due to the next part of Voldemort's plan, and the number of Vampires had greatly diminished.

He spotted a few Werewolves and Centaurs helping the Order into bringing down the remaining Giants and he was surprised to see Hagrid ordering his half-brother Grawp to trip one of the enemies. He hadn't even seen Hagrid coming in all the commotion. Dumbledore though did not look phased by the Half-Giant's presence, nor any Order member for that matter, so they must have known that Hagrid had been successful into getting his only family member to help.

The green eyed boy quickly ran to one of the Centaurs, who turned out to be Isis, one of the females from Bane and Firenze's clan. "We have to get rid of those Giants NOW! Dementors are coming and judging by the growing cold I'd say they managed to reproduce to an alerting number!" He urged.

The female looked at the Giants, the sky, and then back at Harry. "Alright then. I guess it is now time for the creatures of the forest to do their part." She unhooked a horn hanging from her belt and blew in it. The sound made many heads turn in their direction and Bane galloped towards them.

A rustle in the forest was their only warning before hundreds of Acromantulas, sizing from a big dog's to a house's height hurried out of the woodland, followed quickly by Aragog and Mosag. Owls and other birds from the Forbidden Forest flew around the Giants' heads and the enormous spiders used their sticky webs to trip and capture them while they were busy fending the birds off.

The three twenty feet tall men fell with a loud boom and Aragog and his mate made sure they were completely stuck in the webs before making a hasty retreat when the cold became too much for them to handle.

Dumbledore and the other Aurors used a complex spell to make them go to sleep for quite a while and then they turned their attention towards the darkened sky. The others followed the Headmaster's example. "ALL THOSE WHO KNOW THE PATRONUS CHARM RAISE YOUR WAND AND PREPARE YOURSELF! I WANT THE OTHERS TO STAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CIRCLE WHERE YOU WILL BE PROTECTED!" Dumbledore then removed his wand from his throat, voiding the Sonorus charm.

"They're coming! All together now!"

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

Animals of all the varieties, ranging from the minuscule mouse to something as big as an elephant or two, sprung into the air in a shower of silver light. Some people, feeling too much despair from the Dementors' nearness, only managed to create some white fog. The remaining Aurors, Ministry officials and Order members ordered the forty or so Patronuses to form a line around the tight circle, the flying ones protecting them from above, creating a shining dome of some sort.

Harry sighed in relief when he caught sight of a silver German Sheppard strolling to his silver Padfoot's side. Now he at least knew that Sirius was somewhere in the circle, fierce and loyal Sirius, just like his Animagus and Patronus ideals.

But his relief soon turned to dread, and he wasn't the only one, when he finally saw the Dementors approaching. The hundreds, no, thousand of soul-sucking monsters flew to them in a glacial dark mass. Harry only hoped that Remus was safe where he was before he mentally ordered, not without straining against the cold seeping from the silver dome, Moony and Padfoot to attack the oncoming Dementors. Prongs was going to stay near him just in case.

Together, the Azkaban guardians fell into a swoop attack and pounded on the dome viciously even if the Patronuses hurt them; a couple of unfortunate losses were necessary to find a flaw in the

shield, weak Patronuses if you will. Many times when the dome actually bent down with the force of the blows.

People in the middle kept screaming in fright and crying between two awful memories. The Centaurs, who had also taken refuge in the group, tried to keep a stoic front, but seemed to be rapidly failing. Many Patronuses disappeared at the same time when the Dementors attacked again, and some of them started to become see-through.

The Patronus experts, Harry included, put more power and happy thoughts into their spell, but it could easily be seen that even though the light shone brighter and many Dementors vanished with a teeth-grinding screech, the sheer number of them simply didn't seem to diminish. Maybe it was the cold, the sprouting dark thoughts or the tiredness that made it seem so.

Tired of simply standing there waiting for some kind of miracle to happen, Harry closed his eyes and he let Padfoot and Moony loose.

'Sirius and Remus, they're going to adopt me. They're alive. They like me as I am. They're going to be my...family.'

Such thoughts boosted his spell and both canines glowed brighter than ever, Prongs also being affected by Harry's sudden happy feelings.

Catching onto his plan, The Order members copied the boy and soon Dementors were being chased all around, screeching and then vanishing when one got caught.

At his side Prongs actually ran through one with his antlers and Harry thought he heard Lee Jordan exclaim his disgust somewhere behind him, but that could just have been his imagination.

But such a reversal of the situation couldn't last forever and soon the Dementors started to retaliate, exuding more and more of their dreary characteristics. Because many Patronuses were now moving around, the protective dome wasn't protecting much anymore and Dementors were actually able to get through and claim their first victims.

Dumbledore and Moody couldn't have that so they sent their Patronuses against the floating enemies in an angry attempt at making them let go of the poor innocents. Many people fell on the ground shivering badly with souls half sucked out, but Harry's heart broke when he heard many parents cry out at the death of their child, and vice-versa.

His wand started to glow even brighter, his right cheek started to burn again.

Goddammit! They'd been at it for what?

Minutes?

Hours?

It certainly seemed like hours to him, and it felt like it too.

His wand glowed even more forcefully. His Patronuses became so bright that they started to emit a rather large aura. Many people staying near him for protection gaped when they not only started to feel overjoyed, but when they could actually see the silver stag slowly becoming brown.

Harry didn't see any of this, though. He was too caught up in his frustration to realize what was happening.

And fuck why was his cheek hurting him like this?!

It was as if he was getting punched, slashed and burned at the same time, as if his skin was downright peeling off of his face...over and over again!

But when he thought he would faint from the sensory overload, a blazing hot inferno of fire caught a legion of Dementors unawares, mostly those highest from the ground, and they scattered away in every direction; they did not leave Hogwarts' ground, though.

A great roar overlapped the inhuman screeches of the unforgiving creatures and, in his haze induced mind, Harry was certain that

Master Gramdam had decided to turn around to help them. The throbbing pain slowly receded once more and he blinked out of his concentrated state when he heard the cheers of his peers, and especially Charlie's whoop of delight. So, Charlie's Romanian contacts had finally arrived.

There were two of them, from what he could see. Harry used this moment of respite to search for Sirius. He found his tired looking yet still high spirited Godfather to be standing right beside Charlie, Bill and Firenze.

Charlie looked more than happy; the bags under his eyes did not do him justice. He was still holding on.

Now that the Dragons were closer Harry could see what they looked like. One was definitely a Norwegian Ridgeback and Hagrid's joyful shout of "NORBERT!!!" confirmed it, to Harry's amusement. Except that "Norbert" wasn't as small and defenceless anymore.

Both Dragons had a saddle on their back similar to the one Master Gramdam had used but both riders were human, Dragontamers like Charlie. He didn't recognize the second fire-breathing beast's type so a quick question to the Weasley and he knew: it was a Common Welsh Green.

Harry'd heard of them in class but he had never seen one. It was unfortunate that it was a...more tame kind but nonetheless dangerous to the Dementors, especially when it breathed a scorching hot narrow jet of fire at them.

The Patronuses were kept up for the fight below while the two Dragontamers roamed the skies: they didn't want to approach the people on the ground too much, Dragons were Dragons after all. The Common Welsh Green didn't eat humans, only sheep, and Norbert had been somewhat tamed when he recognized Hagrid as his dear 'mother' when he hatched, but one couldn't take any chances.

The Dragontamers did a good job. The Dementor ranks were quickly decimating and when Harry thought they could finally rest another roar shook the earth. Harry feared that this would happen sooner or

later; Voldemort must have known some way or another that they had Dragons and he must have set his second one free. But they had two on their side so what could possibly go wrong, right?

But the roar seemed to greatly unnerve Norbert and the Common Welsh Green. Harry gasped and used *Sonorus* when he finally spotted the oncoming beast. "GET OUT OF THE WAY!"

Seconds later there was a hurt filled screech and the Common Welsh hit the ground hard enough to leave a giant hole of dirt. Voldemort's Hungarian Horntail was standing on top of it and trying to kill the Welsh by snapping its huge jaws around the other Dragon's neck. Its rider hadn't survived the fatal fall.

The people on the ground quickly regrouped but a couple were hit by stray jets of fire. Not even having any time to mourn the dead, the most experienced hurriedly put up protective shields around the rest, their Patronuses staying alert outside the domes of magic.

Now that Harry had enough time to see the Dragon up as close as they all could, he couldn't help but be horrified by its appearance. The Common Welsh was trying as hard as it could to retaliate but everyone could see that this was a lost cause; the other Dragontamer was trying to get near it but each time a fifty feet tall jet of fire had him veering Norbert out of harm's way.

This Horntail was nothing like the one Harry had faced back in his fourth year; this one was stark ravin' livid! It was extremely large, even for a Horntail. They were actually very lucky that their Dragons were keeping it occupied or else they would have been first on the list.

It had hard-as-diamond black scales, a spiked tail that could crush the Whomping Willow in a heartbeat and sickly yellow eyes with vertical pupils. Some people had to use the *Muffliato* charm on their ears to stifle its yowling-screaching scream.

Harry felt Sirius put his hand on his shoulder and squeeze in a resemblance of comfort but when the boy looked up his Godfather was sporting a rather grim look. Truly, this beast was terrifying and making quick snack of the Welsh Green.

“I’ve never seen a Dragon, even the angriest, act like this. That behaviour is unheard of! What could have happened to it? What did You-Know-Who do to it?!” Charlie asked himself, horror written in his eyes.

Harry gazed back at the black Dragon and he narrowed his eyes when it finally claimed the life of its victim. The Welsh’s blood coated Hogwarts’ ground thoroughly in a parody of red rain when the neck’s main artery was viciously bit into. “I think...”

Charlie spared a look at Harry.

“ This one seems to have been starved to insure maximum aggressiveness. It’s not above Voldemort to do this to any creature.”

Charlie closed his eyes and nodded resentfully. “You’re probably right.”

A roar from Norbert brought the Horntail’s attention back to the sky and it took flight once more. The black Dragon tried as much as it could to tackle Norbert to the ground like it did the Welsh but Norbert evaded each attempt narrowly. Both started to spit jets of flames at the other. Norbert, in a show of pure luck, was able to burn the Horntail’s right flank. The black Dragon howled in pain but it didn’t deter its hunger for blood.

Many wandering Dementors perished in this ungraceful aerial ballet. Minutes went on agonizingly slowly and neither Dragon looked ready to give up, even if they did begin to look tired. Hagrid, under another shield with most of the Centaurs, was crying out each time Norbert came close to being burned or tackled. Hagrid’s pet did receive some nasty gashes though.

After a while, seeing that it wasn’t going to catch Norbert anytime soon, the Horntail’s attention diverted towards the people on the ground and it turned around swiftly.

A dangerous jet of flame tested the shields' resistance. One almost collapsed and the one Harry was under flickered violently. McGonagall, who was holding it up, cried out and fell down on her knees, beads of sweat rolling down her face. Before anyone could do something to help the teacher the Dragon attacked again, and this time it concentrated on their shield, to their horror.

The people under the other domes shouted and screamed in fright as the Horntail battered the shield with its hind paws. Dumbledore, under his own shield, had to be restrained by a Centaur and three House-Elves when the Deputy-Headmistress' shield collapsed, along with her.

Sirius cursed out loud and ran to help the fallen teacher, trying to rally their entire screaming group together. They scattered like scared wild animals, not even thinking that they had their wands to protect themselves. The Horntail swooped down and nearly gobbled Amos Diggory if not for Norbert swooping down and stopping it. But the Horntail was too quick and hit the mounted Dragon with its spiked tail. Norbert's tamer fell down and the Ridgeback was catapulted away, hitting the ground directly in the forest. They waited with baited breath but Norbert didn't come back.

Harry vaguely heard Hagrid crying but couldn't contemplate whether or not Norbert was still alive; the Horntail had spotted him and was coming his way. Harry used a very bad word out loud when he realized he was standing there all alone, the others of his group out of harm's way under Amelia Bones and Auror Dawlish's new shield. Sirius was screaming and hitting the dome, trying to get to his Godson, until he was restrained by the Obliviator Arnold Peasegood.

"Infindo Infidi Infissum!"

His wand glowed but the Horntail evaded the nasty cutting spell and continued to advance on him. Its eyes glowed in the dark of the night.

Harry gritted his teeth. "Depulso!"

The spell hit but rebounded off the black scales.

He briefly had the idea of thrusting Gryffindor's sword in the Dragon's underbelly but the scales were protecting it everywhere. He tried the spell he almost never used: the Killing Curse proved ineffective.

The earth shook dangerously.

Harry didn't want to use all of his magic against the Dragon because he knew that's what Voldemort was waiting for: a moment of weakness. The Dragon accelerated and swooped down on him...

His cheek started to sting again.

He closed his eyes tightly.

He didn't see his wand becoming bright red.

Everywhere the people screamed in denial but as his end came near he only heard muffled sounds.

Then nothing.

Then, all of a sudden, he was aware he had fallen on the blood soaked grounds and a huge...something above him shadowed him from the moon's rays. Protected him from the Hungarian Horntail.

His heart beat faster in his chest.

He couldn't quite make out what had saved him but he did see the enormous hole in the ground in front of him. He recognized this kind of hole! They were made by...

A vicious hiss brought him back to reality and he smirked darkly while getting up.

Now Voldemort would pay!

He wasn't going to let the Vampire, what was his name again? Ah yes, Aleksandr Mikhailov. He wasn't going to let the being drink his blood from his defeated carcass. He wasn't going to let the Vampire's sudden show of mercy go to waste!

Everyone eyed the Basilisk in horror. Some automatically closed their eyes, like Hermione and some Ravenclaws. Sirius and the Centaurs were the only ones breathing in relief. A look of understanding crossed Charlie's face; he remembered what had happened with the Dragon in Gringotts.

The Horntail screeched a horrible sound, taking a step towards the Basilisk.

Salazar, eyes closed in case humans were around, was waiting for his master's orders but hissed a long warning note.

Harry's fists closed tightly and a sinister glint entered his eyes.

He started to hiss.

Softly at first, but many people, human or not, flinched violently when the hiss became loud, clipped and hostile.

Rosmerta, standing beside Albus, watched all what was happening with bathed breath. The look on James'...no...Harry's face scared her. "Seeing Harry fight like this..."

Albus spared her a look; he was half-listening, as were others from their group.

"It reminds me of James Evans, and how powerful he appeared to us all. It reminds me that James Evans and Harry Potter are one and the same. It reminds me that Harry IS dangerous and not to be underestimated."

Nobody argued.

All the while, Salazar attacked, eyes still closed, waiting for the right moment when his master would tell him to open them.

Harry's third familiar didn't need to see his prey in order to attack; a good whiff was enough and when the Dragon moved the air shifted around. Salazar attacked so fast that the Horntail didn't have time to

budge; the Basilisk took a quick bite at one of the Dragon's wings, his fangs hard enough to pass through without any problem.

The Horntail let out a pain filled yowl and tried to bite Salazar who evaded deftly and took a bite at one front paw in the way.

Another yowl.

The Horntail, angry and on the defensive for the first time, became more vicious when it felt it really was in danger. Harry saw it preparing to fire, literally.

"Sssalazar Come to me and go down the tunnel you came out of! Quickly now!"

The great beast obeyed and slithered hastily towards the green eyed boy. Everyone thought that he was going to be eaten alive by the magical snake but Harry surprised them all by jumping on it when it passed by, using a sticking spell on the snake to stay on it when it quickly slithered back underground.

The big ball of flame hit nothing but earth and maybe a few shields.

The Horntail pawed the ground nervously; it could feel something was underneath, just waiting for the right moment to strike...and it couldn't fly anymore. The injured front paw was mostly kept off the ground in pain and blood, mixed with something else unidentifiable, flowed down freely.

Sirius briefly muttered "poison". A few of them had already come to that conclusion.

Suddenly the ground shook again and Salazar came out of a new hole right underneath the Dragon, taking quite a big bite at the belly just in time. The Horntail didn't even have enough time to let out a roar; it came crashing down in seconds.

Harry hissed menacingly. Salazar coiled around the suffering Dragon's neck and poised his face right in front of the other creature.

The people around could hear the eerie wheezing breathing the brutal suffocation provoked.

“Ssalazar, open your eyesss and kill it. It’s too far gone to try to sssave it now.”

“Asss you wissh, Massster Harry.”

Nobody saw the yellow eyes open except the Dragon and in that state, poisoned and beaten, it died just like that without another sound.

The shields disappeared one by one as cheers erupted in the crowd at the Dragon’s defeat but Harry wasn’t enjoying this small victory at all. The poor animal hadn’t deserved that fate. Damn Voldemort for his cruelty!

“And where is he anyway?” Harry murmured to himself.

He was brought out of his musing by Salazar, who had once again closed his eyes even if the public stayed clear of him. “Masster Harry, people are coming. People with ill intent, I can ssenssse it. They sssmell like my old massster.”

Harry didn’t have time to tell anyone because they were already being bombarded by spells; a second wave of Death Eaters, less numerous than the first wave but probably more powerful, were running and gliding in their direction. The Dark Servants had taken advantage of their distracted, euphoric state to attack in force.

Salazar shielded Harry from a Cruciatus Curse, which rebounded to its caster. The green eyed boy spotted a little Death Eater group separated from the rest and he Accioed them with a wave of his hand. Harry stepped aside and they crashed on the ground roughly. A little hissed order and Salazar’s eyes were open once more and the group was dead in a fraction of a second.

The boy swore when he spotted a Death Eater from the second wave free the ones the Light side had previously captured.

“Voldemort knew when to send his troops. He could see us, I’m sure of it. But he’s not stupid as to stay near the battle; he wants me and he knows I know. He counted on the fact that I would be able to find him, counted on the fact that I would act foolishly enough as to go confront him alone. But where could he be? Some place near Hogwarts but far enough to stay out of sight...Hogsmeade? No...”

While chaos reigned once more around him and he was too concentrated to care, Salazar decided to shield him again by coiling in a circle around the boy and biting anyone who came remotely close. The Basilisk couldn’t risk opening his eyes without Harry’s order because that would maybe kill a friendly face but he certainly had other killing methods.

“Not Hogsmeade... At least not directly in it.....”

A shout of victory from Sirius made him blink into reality and Salazar moved his tail slightly out of the way, just in time for Harry to see the deranged Bellatrix be felled by his bloody but still standing Godfather. She took a transfigured knife to the heart and Harry couldn’t be happier to see Sirius have his revenge. After all, if Remus had been alone in his old world it was the evil woman’s fault, not his; he understood that now.

‘Remus...Sirius.....Remus.....Moony.....Shrieking Shack! Of course! Why didn’t I think of that? Voldemort is in the Shrieking Shack: you can see Hogwarts’ grounds from the top floor! I have to go there but I can’t endanger anyone else by allowing them to follow me. Besides, they’re already busy with the Death Eaters but it’s nothing too worrisome...I’ll just slip away quietly...’ Harry thought, biting his lip hard enough to draw blood when he sent a look in his distracted Godfather’s direction.

“Sorry Sirius,” he murmured to no one in particular, “sorry Remus. I hope you’ll be alright until I return, if I ever do. Please take care.”

Salazar created the perfect distraction because no one actually dared come near it anymore. Harry told the magical snake to stay put in the

same coiled position as if he was still there and he snuck out of the grounds behind his familiar, his cape of invisibility helping his escape greatly. If he hadn't magicked it smaller in one of his pockets he would have used a simple Disillusionment spell. He was afraid Dumbledore or Moody would spot him but apparently they were too preoccupied to see anything else but the enemy in front of them.

Minutes went by. The sound of war was replaced with the sound of his feet quietly stepping on soft earth. The path to Hogsmeade, and therefore the Shrieking Shack, had never felt so long in his life. His heart beat faster and faster; not in trepidation but in some kind of dark excitement at once again being able to fight Tom but without anyone throwing themselves in his way to save him.

He knew what he was doing. He knew that in a one-on-one battle Tom was more powerful than him spell-wise, especially since he hadn't died here so had more time to study the Dark Arts. But he had the element of surprise with him and a feeling in his gut told him not to worry. Both way, one would live and come out victorious and the other would perish a most gruesome death.

.....

Harry dropped his cape as soon as he entered the dilapidated shack, shrinking it and putting it back in his pocket. He could feel it: nobody was around, the Dark Lord was alone.

The old stairs creaked ominously with each step he took. He kept his wand out and it glowed softly in the darkness, but contrary to the usual white light of the Lumos spell, this one had a red hue to it. For a few minutes he deplored the absence of Nagini but she was better off guarding Remus.

When he finally reached upstairs, he took a few seconds to completely clear his mind from all his thoughts; Remus, Sirius, the battle, his friends...He couldn't let them become a liability in his oncoming fight with Voldemort. Then he heard a voice.

“Ahh, I have been waiting for you for a while, Potter. Do come in.”

The voice, even without the strong sibilant tone, still sounded as aristocratic as he remembered. Harry pushed a door open, his wand still in hand, yet he didn't think the Lord would use a surprise attack on him. It was just a precaution.

As he thought, Voldemort got up from a cushioned cherry-wood chair in a flourish but his wand was nowhere in sight. Harry wasn't fooled; he knew the yew wand was there somewhere, hidden in the Lord's long sleeved robes. He took just a few seconds to survey the room; it had been charmed to look like a place fit for a king, all kinds of knick-knacks laying about...dangerous ones, but still interesting to look at.

"Harry Potter. Still a thorn in my side even after I killed you. I counted on you to show up way earlier than this. As you can see I had to make myself comfortable. You will forgive me if I don't offer you tea and biscuits, I'm afraid I am all out."

Harry didn't take the jibe. His stoic vibrant green eyes stayed rooted on bloody red ones.

"Tom, I was very much disappointed when I didn't see you on the battlefield. But you certainly did have many pawns to take your place."

The Dark Lord chuckled. "Didn't I?" But then his face contorted in rage. "Yet you and your pathetic army found your way to retaliate longer than I had anticipated. Of course I watched all this from here and launched the attacks when I saw fit. I also saw" here his voice got just a little bit louder "my Basilisk being ordered around!" He said in fury. He didn't mention Nagini but Harry knew he also silently referred to the Cobra.

Angry as he was, Voldemort found a way to calm down, his face going back to the usual impassive facade. "Yet I am ready to forget all of this if you join my side. I would also be ready to spare a most grisly fate to your mutt of a Godfather and that Werewolf friend of his."

Harry mentally rolled his eyes. 'Oh boy, here he goes again.'

"I'm afraid, Tom, that I will have to decline your offer. You see, I was most displeased when I learned that you had also killed my parents here. Excuse me if I don't find a place in my heart to forgive you. That, and I just plain hate your gut." Harry shrugged.

The older man's eyes narrowed. "I see..." He slowly lowered his arm and his wand dropped in his hand. "It is a pity to kill such a talented dark Wizard; a waste of Parseltongue ability too. You would have been such a sight to see, bowed down beside me as my second in command. But I see that your mind is made. I won't deplore your loss too much though. I must admit I hate you too."

"You break my heart," Harry deadpanned.

Tom sneered and lifted his wand in a heartbeat, sending a Killing Curse in the boy's way. Harry dropped to the floor in reflex and sent back his favourite cutting curse, the Lacerus spell. Voldemort batted it away with ease but Harry was prepared for that and fired the Occido curse. Tom side-stepped it and sent one of his creations back. "Exsanguis!" It was a dangerous spell, created mostly to fight against Vampires because it rid its victim of their blood.

Harry lifted his glowing wand. Now he would see if the Priori Incantatem worked with his different wand. "Cingo Cingere Cinxi Cinctum!"

A bright dark blue shield surrounded Harry from head to toe and Voldemort shook his head as if disappointed in Harry when the spell rebounded. "Tsk, tsk, Mr. Potter. What would Dumbledore say if he saw you using such dark spells? And your –precious- Godfather? Turning evil, Potter?" The mouth lifted into a twisted smirk.

Harry smirked back, infuriating Voldemort with his cheek. It was too bad the Priori Incantatem hadn't activated but it didn't matter now.

"First, I don't care what Dumbledore thinks of me. Second, Sirius knows everything about me. I can almost hear him telling me to kick

your arse back to the Stone Age. I remember the expression on his face when he killed that treacherous cousin of his, Bellatrix. And the look on hers when she realized that she had a knife embedded in her heart right before dying. It was delicioussss,” Harry hissed in English while liking his lips in pleasure.

Voldemort’s eyes glowed darkly and he screamed in rage. Harry’s shield collapsed brutally and he was flung across the room with a brutal wave of magic. He hit the wall and went right through the aged wood, the illusion on the room vanishing completely.

The landing was harsh but well worth it. He felt a couple of ribs crack and winced while he got up.

“Meliusculus Ossis.” He muttered a quick healing spell towards his mid-section and sighed when his injured bones started to hurt less. That spell wasn’t really advanced though, so he would get ugly bruises later until he saw a real Healer.

Voldemort gracefully stepped over a rotted wooden beam, his wand still pointed right at Harry. He looked downright livid when he threw the Cruciatus at the other. Harry side-stepped it but Voldemort knew he’d do that and retaliated with a volley of the second Unforgivable.

Harry couldn’t dodge them all and got caught by two stray ones. He swallowed a scream while his opponent laughed in morbid delight.

“Ha! Ha! Ha! How do you feel now, Potter? Not so defiant now, are you? You make such a wonderful sight standing there before me, trying to resist the curse before the inevitable happens. You WILL scream for me, Harry Potter! You will SUFFER and you will DIE when I am through with you! Then I will bring you back with Necromancy and I will do it all over again! And again and again and again! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

This was the laughter of a madman.

Harry felt his cheek start to sting once more. He gripped his wand and gritted his teeth before lashing out, his arms spread outwards. "EXOSSO!"

Voldemort, who didn't foresee the boy freeing himself so fast, didn't have any time to use a shielding spell and instinctually turned on the side, protecting his wand arm with the other. He couldn't help but bellow in pain when his bones literally vanished from his arm, rendering it unusable. He retaliated with a widespread Killing Curse and Harry had to throw himself to the floor and roll around not to get hit.

He grimaced in pain when his cheek went from stinging to burning and his ribs protested against the move.

After this luminous green wave the older man shot cutting curse after cutting curse, mixing with them a few dangerous jinxes and elemental attacks. This barrage of spells had the desired effect of making the boy back away far enough to let him heal his flopping arm. A great wave of wand and long incantation later Voldemort flexed the re-grown yet still tender appendage.

They took this time to take a breather and look at each other darkly. Both were panting in exhaustion but neither appeared ready to give up quite yet. The walls surrounding them were chockfull of holes from the wayward curses and the Shrieking Shack groaned in protest at the usage of such dangerous spellwork, its already fragile foundations being put to the test in a way they had never been before; both men had no delusions that this whole place was moments away from tumbling apart on top of their heads.

In seconds both began to try to kill the other again.

"DEFLAGRATIO!"

"CONTORQUEO TRABIS!"

Voldemort sent a huge fireball at him and Harry thought fast. He targeted a fallen wooden beam and hurled it in the fire's direction.

The whole thing exploded in dark red flames and ashes fell on the floor. Harry and the Dark Lord were forced to step back when their spells collided but quickly gained their footing back.

“SERPENSORTIA!” was countered by “SERPENSORTIA!”

Both snakes were ordered to kill their creator’s enemy but they ended up killing each other instead.

“Will this continue ‘till eternity’s end? Why won’t you just –die-?” Tom snarled in aggravation at the stalemate they were forced in.

“Right back at you, Riddle!” Harry spat, wiping blood all over his face when he went to remove dribbling sweat, dust and grime from it. He was also favouring his ill-treated ribs. He was just happy Voldemort wasn’t fairing any better than him and appeared just as tired.

They stood still for a while, just gazing at the other, gauging just how much they had left in them to finish this once and for all.

The silence was strained and uncomfortable, broken only by the occasional groaning and hazardous quaking of the shack.

Harry stepped forward to attack again...and part of the floor in front of him cracked loudly and broke down to the floor below and to the next until it all landed with a boom at the entrance. Harry yelped and stepped back clumsily, almost losing his footing and falling down the hole. Voldemort cried out in victory at the moment of weakness. “AVADA KEDAVRA!”

Harry was certain he was going to get hit but he managed just in time to blurt out the same spell, kneeling on the floor. Both Killing Curses hit the other dead center and there started the battle of wills.

For a long time they held their wands tightly, just holding the Unforgivable up.

The strain was great and Harry had never had to use it for so long. The backlash of green fog around them made the two suffocate slightly. Voldemort roared in a great effort and doubled the pressure of his attack, making the width of his spell twice as large so Harry's was slowly being engulfed in it and pushed back towards the boy.

Harry grunted in pain and fatigue, bowing ever more under the overwhelming force. 'That's it,' he briefly thought in a moment of lucidity, 'it's either me or him.'

His green eyes started to cloud over and droop. His whole body sagged down and his wand arm dropped slightly. His Killing Curse decreased in size.

'No...' He thought sluggishly, not even aware he had also spoken out loud.

"No," he repeated again, his eyes gaining some of their spark back and his arm going rigid again, "NO! I WILL NOT BE THE ONE TO DIE TODAY!!!"

He screamed.

He screamed the most terrifying scream Tom Riddle had ever heard; it was bone-chilling, even to him.

He screamed in pain.

In agony.

For the first time in his life Tom Marvolo Riddle, alias the great Lord Voldemort, was scared, deathly scared for his life when Potter's killing curse grew to an abnormal size and started to ram onto his own. The boy's magic itself literally exploded outwards, making it impossible for the Dark Lord to even look in his direction.

And Harry continued to scream, oblivious to it all, letting go of his wand when the intensity of outputted magic burned his hand.

With his nails he tore at his right cheek and torso, even ripping through his robes to get to his skin.

It hurt. God it hurt so bad!

Why couldn't he get the skin off?!

Blood flowed down his face and torso but it didn't matter to him.

If he could just. Rip. The. Skin. OFF!

Because it felt just like it; as if parts of his skin was literally tearing away from his body along with a part of his soul.

The pain lasted an eternity. Eternity lasted a mere few seconds.

Before he completely blacked out he thought he heard a Phoenix singing just for him. At least he thought so; it felt so right. But in his delirious state it could have just been his imagination. Was he going to die? At least it didn't hurt anymore. The heart-warming song made him smile and then he knew no more.

Voldemort, too, heard the infuriating song. He heard it alright, right before being blasted into oblivion by an explosion of raw magic so intense that it made the Shrieking Shack completely collapse in a shower of debris and was heard and felt miles away from the initial spot.

Then everything just stopped.

No more magical surge.

No more sound.

No more Shrieking Shack.

And especially no more Voldemort.

Just darkness, a darkness gradually being swallowed by the sun's hungry rays.

.....,

Just about everyone on the battlefield froze in mid-attack and turned to look in Hogsmeade's direction when they heard, saw AND felt the enormous blast. The trees in the Forbidden Forest quivered under an invisible wave of power.

Everything and everyone kept deathly still even when the explosion dissipated. And then Death Eaters all around started to scream and claw at their dark-marked arms at the same time.

The Light side made quick work of them.

Sirius had a sudden epiphany and glanced in the retreating Basilisk's direction. Harry was not there.

He gazed in the explosion's direction in panic and dread. "Oh God Harry!" he rasped out and immediately transformed into Padfoot, taking off in the village's way. He never heard the enthusiasm of his peers, never heard Moony weakly calling for him from his place beside Orion.

.....

He arrived at quite a desolate sight to see: Hogsmeade had been completely levelled.

The blast, though, seemed to originate from the Shrieking Shack...

Or what was left of it...

Actually the hill it had been standing on simply didn't exist anymore.

Padfoot whined loudly and rushed to the place where the shack once stood. He transformed back and couldn't bite back a gasp when he reached his destination: there was nothing left, not even a small piece of wood.

What remained was just a charred crater twice the size of the old memory-filled shack.

And finally Sirius' sight landed on the person he had so frantically searched for without a care in the world if Voldemort was still alive or not. Right there, lying right in the center of the huge hole was his Godson, almost as naked as the day he was born.

Sirius called the boy's name in joy.

Harry did not respond.

The Animagus' smile fell in alarm and he rushed to the immobile boy, to his precious Godson. He stumbled while running down the crater and fell right in front of Harry and shook him. Tears rushed down his cheeks when the boy stayed silent and unmoving. Sirius gathered Harry in his arm and started to rock him back and forth almost deliriously.

"Harry! Harry, don't do this to me! Don't die! Don't leave me! You promised you'd come back! We promised we'd adopt you! Oh Remus! What will Remus do? What will I do without you?!"

He started to laugh hysterically yet tears of anguish still poured down his cheeks, falling on his Godson's bloodied ones. He held the precious body tightly, too far gone to even check for a pulse. "HarryHarryHarryHarryHarry-

"Mister Black!"

"_"

"SIRIUS!" Someone sighed. "Petrificus Totalus!"

Sirius slumped down, still holding an unresponsive Harry.

Remus tiredly made his way down the crater with Orion's help. His breath hitched in his throat when he spotted Harry's condition and he

closed his eyes tightly before he slowly bent down to remove the boy from his friend's tight grasp.

“God Sirius, why didn't you wait for me? You didn't need to see Harry like this. You never were able to control your emotions.”

He gathered Harry gently in his arms and, with shaking hands betraying his outward calm appearance, searched for a pulse, even the tiniest sign of life.

“Is he...Is he alive?” Orion asked anxiously.

A soft relieved sigh made the Centaur follow suite.

“Yes. Thank Merlin he is...but he's not out of the woods yet. He's very weak; I can barely detect his life signs. Gods what happened here?!”

He hoisted Harry up in his arms with great difficulty and Orion proposed to take Harry since he was stronger at the moment. Maybe doing magic on Harry in his state would do more harm than good so the Werewolf didn't risk it.

Remus accepted the offer with a thankful look and set off to wake Sirius. “Finite Incantatem.”

Sirius blinked tears out of his blue eyes and jumped up. “HARRY!”

Remus slapped him.

Hard.

“Sirius! Harry's alive but he needs to see a MediWizard right now. I need you to stay focused! Don't lose control now.”

Sirius nodded slowly so Remus took his hands off of his friend's shoulders when he was certain the Animagus wouldn't start another panic attack.

“Where is he? Where is Harry?!” He looked around with bloodshot and tear-filled eyes until his searching gaze landed on the Centaur. “Give him to me.”

Orion and Remus shared a look.

Sirius managed to look desperate and determined at the same time. “I want to hold him! I want him in my arms! He’s MY Godson!” he intoned viciously. There was no reasoning with him in that condition.

Remus motioned for a hesitating Orion to obey Sirius, whose arms were spread wide to receive the boy. When Harry was finally in his arms he held him delicately, as if he was made of glass.

“We have to go. He has to get treated right now or we’ll lose him.”

Sirius nodded and kissed the unconscious boy’s brow tenderly, murmuring no-nonsense words to him. Remus put his tattered cloak on the half-naked boy. “It isn’t much but it’s better than freezing to death.” He also wanted to add a warming charm but decided against it, once again under the pretext of doing magic on a near-dead person.

Sirius only held him closer to share some of his body heat. “Remus, check in his pant pockets. He usually brings his Firebolt everywhere with him.”

Remus obeyed.

“His invisibility cloak. That’s how he was able to escape without being seen.”

Remus checked the other pocket and retrieved the broomstick.

“Enlarge it. I’ll ride on it with Harry. We’ll get to Hogwarts faster like that.”

The Werewolf didn’t look so sure of Sirius’ plan.

“Don’t worry Remus. I’m not as far gone as you think. You know Harry is one of my most precious people, along with you.”

The golden eyed man finally relented when he noticed that the sun was almost up. “Engorgio.”

Sirius carefully mounted the broom and tucked Harry safely in his arms. Orion motioned for Remus to jump on his back. Normally he wouldn’t let just anyone do that but these men cared for Harry as much and probably even more than he did, and that was saying something.

Remus did as asked tiredly and they all moved away from this fateful place without a backward glance; the place where it all –finally- ended.

Orion galloped slowly, keeping up with Sirius who didn’t want to push the Firebolt too fast. Soon enough they reached the castle, where everyone was being tended to inside.

They rushed in.

AUTHOR’S NOTE! READ!

Oh my GOD! Thank the high deities up there that this chapter is finally done. It’s 41 f\$cking pages long! (I’m finally almost healed from my jaw surgery so it helps...Thanks to those who sympathised with me, by the way...)

I hope it pleased you all enough. I wanted an elaborate war scene, not just a: “they attacked...the next day they found themselves in the Hospital Wing” kind of thing. I just hope it wasn’t too confusing, though. But I had no trouble re-reading myself so you should all be okay. And forgive me if there are still grammatical errors or whatever. As I said I re-read it but it’s a really long detailed chapter and I may have skipped over one or two errors without even seeing them. This is un-betaed, people!

So, how do you all like it? Worth the wait I hope!

I particularly liked the Infirmary part with Ron and Dudley (laughs) you didn't see that one coming, eh? I also like my new personage, the Russian Vampire Aleksandr Mikhailov. If he's popular I will mention him and probably bring him back in the next chapter. You must also be wondering if Norbert is dead. And what of Severus Snape? And that mysterious repetitive stinging and burning of Harry's cheek, that must've mind-boggled you! Mwahahahaha! You'll all know in the next chapter!

Ah yes, the next chapter...and probably the last (cry.....in joy or sadness, this author doesn't know. Probably both). It will come out way faster than this one, I promise you. I already have all my main ideas written down and I know my ending. I promise it won't be made in an epilogue, like ten years later... Next chapter will follow where I left it and things will still be happening.

Stay tuned for the next chapter where you'll see what will become of Harry and all the gang!

Thanks to those who review and still stay with me even after all this time. I won't deceive you all. You push me to do better each time!

Eternal Cosmos

Chapter 33: Looking up

Last time

Sirius carefully mounted the broom and tucked Harry safely in his arms. Orion motioned for Remus to jump on his back. Normally he wouldn't let just anyone do that but these men cared for Harry as much and probably even more than he did, and that was saying something.

Remus did as asked tiredly and they all moved away from this fateful place without a backward glance; the place where it all –finally– ended.

Orion galloped slowly, keeping up with Sirius who didn't want to push the Firebolt too fast. Soon enough they reached the castle, where everyone was being tended to inside.

They rushed in.

WW

NOW

Of course, first thing that happened was Sirius being mobbed by a frantic gang of Gryffindors. Said man almost literally barked at them to get out of his way and while Remus sent him a reproachful look, he did not try to tell his friend to show a little composure and patience.

The Werewolf pushed them aside gently so Sirius could pass but Hagrid did a more thorough job when he almost sent Ritchie Coote, Victoria Frobisher and one of the Creevey brothers reeling on the floor when he limped by and disappeared outside, muttering nervously about “Norbert”.

Remus shook his head at the Half-Giant's hurried departure but when he turned around he had to run up the stairs to catch up to Sirius who was already gone from his sight.

The hustle and bustle in the Infirmary nearly came to a stop when Sirius stomped in. Amongst all the MediWizards present, Poppy was the first to reach him and motioned a bed for the haggard man to put Harry on. Seconds later the unconscious young man was being hooked to all kinds of magical devices by the Matron who was barking up orders left and right.

Remus silently walked up to Harry's bed and became queasy when he bypassed a bed where a thin white sheet was completely stretched over the patient, head included. 'Merlin above, please help Harry...' He put a hand on Sirius' shoulder and squeezed lightly. The Animagus was silently glad for his best friend's support but his gaze stayed rooted on his Godson's pale form.

A couple of weary Order members approached them, Albus at the lead. "What happened to him, Remus?" The Headmaster knew better than to ask Sirius; the man looked completely grief-stricken.

The Werewolf barely sent them a glance. "We found Harry in a crater where the Shrieking Shack used to be. He was already like this when we arrived..."

A couple of Ministry Officials pushed the Order members aside frantically.

"What do you mean where the Shrieking Shack used to be?"

"Can you be a little more specific?"

"Where's You-Know-Who?"

Remus lost patience. He snarled and lifted one of the men right off the floor only to shove him against a wall, practically strangling him. Wands pointed in his direction when Remus' eyes became a solid gold and his voice took on a more animalistic pitch. "I don't freakin' care where He is! You morons could do your job for once and go see for yourselves! I won't tolerate your harassing behaviour when our" he pointed at Sirius and himself "Godson is lying on a hospital bed half dead!" The enraged Werewolf released the man when he

whimpered in fright and went back to Sirius, the wands pointed at him retracting slowly but surely one by one.

While the Officials scampered away Poppy walked to the nervous black haired man and sighed. "I did everything I could and ran every check-up I knew of; it's not looking good." The MediWitch had never looked so tired in her life, a hand pushing up a few straying locks of grey hair away from her sweat-matted forehead.

The duo sat on Harry's bed, minding the numerous bandages covering the boy's prone form and tubes coming in and going out of him and to the medical equipment. Albus sighed and even though he really wanted to know what was going on with Harry, he urged every non MediWizard personnel and those who didn't need serious treatment out of the Infirmary, to their dismay.

Ron and the rest of the Weasleys, bar Bill who was still on a stretcher, filed out while sending one last concerned glance towards Harry. The Dursleys hurriedly walked out and went back to the comfort of their assigned quarters, out of the Wizards' way.

The Infirmary regained its peaceful silence, except form the occasional hurt-filled cry and the usual sounds of the MediWizards' footsteps around the room.

"Is Harry going to live, Poppy?" Remus finally asked, his voice no more than a silent whisper.

Sirius still hadn't spoken a word.

"I don't know, Remus. He's covered in bruises that even with my healing spells will take probably months, if not years, to mend. Add this to the fact that he's been exposed to major dark spells and is under the most severe case of magical exhaustion I have ever seen...Also...I don't quite know how to explain this...but something's wrong with him on a deeper level that I can't explain..."

The Witch had to strain to hear Remus' voice as the man became even more pallid than before. "Poppy..."

She shook her head. "You both have to understand; Harry is in a coma and I have no idea if he'll ever wake up from it. I'm sorry, but there's nothing else I can do for him. He'll have to wake up on his own."

The words “if he ever does” were kept silent.

She closed her eyes momentarily in order to shake away the despair she saw in Remus' eyes. "If you want to stay here with him I won't stop you, but please stay quiet. I need to help the other patients. Do you need anything before I go?"

Sirius merely lied down beside Harry and transformed into Padfoot, keeping the boy warm. Taking this as Sirius' answer, Remus only asked for a vial of Pepper-Up so he could at least watch over the boy without falling asleep.

Poppy fetched it for him even though she knew the Werewolf needed to sleep. She then left Sirius and Remus to their own thoughts and went back to the other MediWizards.

[illegible]

Remus awoke to frantic whispers and groaned when his neck and back protested at any small movements. Looking down he saw Padfoot and a still comatose Harry in the bed and he almost let out a whine at the thought that the boy may or may not wake up, ever.

Pepper-Up had not been such a good idea to drink after all; its effects had dwindled sometime during the day and now he was sore all over and a couple of deep scratches he received in his fight against the other Werewolf leader were caked in dry blood. These wounds would be a pain in the ass to clean later.

He limped towards the voices that woke him up into a more opened area of the Infirmary and joined Dumbledore who was looking at the nurses bustling around a new patient. The weary Headmaster nodded as a salute and Remus blinked when he finally spotted Snape lying on the bed unconscious and hurt pretty bad.

“What-” Remus rasped his sore throat, “what happened to him?”

He guided a shaken Dumbledore to a chair.

“Hagrid found him in the forest when he was looking for Norbert. We’re pretty certain he duelled Lucius Malfoy because we found the man’s body lying not too far from Severus’. Moody also found young Draco’s petrified body near his father’s; he brought him back to the Ministry for further questioning. I really do not know what kind of punishment he will be sentenced to...Azkaban certainly is out of the question right now.”

Remus hummed. “I can’t believe how fast the Officials are rebuilding the Ministry and the Monarchy. Has a new minister been named already?”

Dumbledore shook his head. “No. They’re all having a debate right now as to who will have the privilege. I think it’s despicable how they’re fighting between each other over that simple matter after the war we’ve just been through.”

Remus snorted softly. “Hn, they’re politicians.”

The Headmaster shook his head in hopelessness and got up when one of the MediWitches walked up to them. “How is Severus, Healer Magdala?”

“He’s going to be fine; he just needs a couple weeks of rest. He’s had several dark curses thrown at him and he must’ve fallen unconscious after defeating Mister Malfoy Senior...Although luck was also on his side...He probably survived all this time because of the potions he had on him. Some of the bottles stashed in his cloak are empty, so he must have drunk them to keep himself alive until someone found him.”

Lupin and Dumbledore sighed in relief. “Albus, you really did hire the best Potions Master in all of Great-Britain...”

The old man's blue eyes twinkled in response, but that light dimmed when he turned in the direction of Harry's bed. "And what about our young hero?"

Remus looked at the ground. “No changes...” he answered dejectedly.

Albus put a comforting hand on the Werewolf's shoulder. "I'll ask Poppy to check him up again. You and Sirius should also get a check-up, just in case. You both looked pretty beat up when you got here this morning. In the mean time I'll try to keep the ministry Officials and the reporters at bay. They'll want to know what happened to Voldemort but I'm afraid no one will really know until Harry wakes up."

‘If he ever wakes up...’

Neither man voiced it out loud but it didn't stop them from thinking about this depressing possibility.

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The next five months sped by like a blur. Of course, Hogwarts couldn't be reopened for the rest of this school year due to the destruction of most of the grounds and the, let's say it, rather long interruption in the year's curriculum.

The newly elected minister, Amelia Bones, did everything in her power to help restore Diagon Alley, the school and Hogsmeade to their former glory; though the giant hole where the Shrieking Shack used to lay was kept as it is as a Historical reminder, wards preventing anyone from going near it until they could have answers about what had happened there. And she did all that just in time for the next generation of first years to arrive.

For once, even Dumbledore was content with the person elected as minister; Amelia Bones was recognized for her impartiality and fierceness in maintaining the law. She would not accept bribes or turn sides under the pressure and could hold her own in a duel, so it was a far cry from the snivelling incompetent usually elected.

Since the seventh years had been disrupted in their schooling more than anybody else (the younger years had had to learn more powerful spells for the war so as a gift they were allowed to move on to the next grade) they had opted to stay at Hogwarts for a couple of months to finish their work and pass their exams. Hermione couldn't have been happier while it took a while to motivate Ron.

Most things had gone back to normal, though some people were still in mourning.

The Centaurs had gone back to their beloved forest and no one had heard from them since. Norbert, to Hagrid's tearful joy, was transported back to Romania with Charlie as its caretaker. The Dragon had suffered a nasty broken wing so they used a lot of calming draughts, binds and a large magical boat to bring it back home.

A funny fact: the contracts between all Death Eaters and their House Elves had been severed by the ministry, so now Hogwarts had a large number of them at its disposition...And Dobby hadn't lost a minute to create havoc amongst them by asking the amused Headmaster to be paid for his services.

Hestia was also back on her feet and working on getting a tan back. Severus was still recuperating from his ordeal so Bill Weasley had accepted to take a break from his Curse Breaker job to teach Potions, a subject he had passed with an O, so he was more than competent for it. That fact did not stop Snape from threatening the oldest Weasley progeny that if anything was out of place when he came back he would feel it 'till kingdom come. Bill merely took it with good humour but assured the man that any ingredient taken from his precious stash would be replaced without delay.

So now a new school year, peaceful for once, was underway. The first Term had already started and a fifth table had been set for the old seventh years, every House included. Albus, as usual, kept a keen eye on everyone as they ate, though his gaze couldn't help but veer in his Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher direction; Sirius Black.

A very lonely looking Sirius Black.

Everyone couldn't help but sympathize with the man: his best friend and Assistant-teacher Remus Lupin was not there to lend a hand this year, being too busy trying to negotiate a treaty between the Werewolf community and the Ministry, something far from an easy feat. And to make the matter worse, Harry Potter had been placed in a permanent injury ward –to Sirius and Remus' great fury- in St-Mungo's, still unresponsive to any attempt at awakening him. Even the teachers and students who knew him well were appalled at the Healers decision of putting him in a Permanent Injury Ward; the name itself revealed that they had lost hope for the green eyed boy's recovery. But it didn't stop Sirius and Remus from going to see him each and every evening to talk to the comatose boy, the only time when the remaining Marauders saw each other these days. They couldn't stay for long on weekdays, but they made up for it on the weekends.

So this is how, this weekend still, both men saw each other.

Sirius looked behind him when he heard shuffling outside his Godson's room but didn't get up from his chair; he already knew who it was. The other man entered in a huff.

“You're late.”

Remus rolled his eyes, put his long coat over the back of Sirius' chair and sat down on Harry's bed, softly pushing a few stray hairs from the young man's face. The cursed lightning bolt scar glared at him and, as if burned, Remus turned his attention back to the Animagus. “I'm sorry. The man they hired to take care of the new Werewolf-Wizard Treaty Program is a complete and utter moron. He managed to insult them three times in today's meeting and I had to undo all of his idiotic moves before he got himself killed.”

Sirius snorted softly. “I don't know why YOU're not the one at the head of this program; the negotiations wouldn't take this long.”

Remus shook his head sadly. "You know people still have prejudices against Werewolves. They're not about to hire one at the Ministry. But Mrs. Bones is looking into it."

Sirius only grunted in response, his sight landing on his Godson once again. "They keep asking news about him."

Remus sent his friend an inquisitive look.

"The people at school, I mean. It's hard to be constantly reminded of Harry's condition day after day. I was thinking about quitting the job," Sirius finished silently.

Remus' eyes widened and he shook his head. "Don't! Sirius, Harry wouldn't want you to do this! And this job is the only thing keeping you away from having a depression at the moment. We just have to be patient."

"Patient? PATIENT! Goddammit, Remus! Every time I come here the nurses tell me the same damn thing! 'I'm sorry Mr. Black, there have been no changes! We apologize, but his magical reserves are still close to nil!' Sorry, sorry, sorry! That's all they say!"

Remus recoiled at his friend's sudden change of tone. "Calm down Sirius. You'll gain nothing by doing this to yourself. I'm as anxious as you are, you know," the Werewolf replied in a hurt filled voice.

The dark haired man immediately calmed down and slouched back down in his chair, a hand massaging his temples. "Sorry Moony. I guess I've been really stressed lately. I keep receiving mail from everyone that's anyone in the Wizarding World asking me about what happened that day and what happened to Harry. People keep pestering me wherever I go as if they really cared about him! They don't even know him! They just want a scoop! I keep getting pitying looks, as if they were sad for my loss! What fucking loss! My Godson's still alive!" Sirius buried his head in his hand and just tried to breathe in and out after saying out loud what he had been keeping bottled up inside.

He felt Moony rub his back in comfort but neither man spoke again for a long while after that.

After an hour or so, a MediWitch softly knocked on the door and told them that visiting hours were over. It was with a heavy heart that both men got up, slid on their coats and bade farewell to the comatose boy on the bed.

Sirius breathed in deeply when they stepped outside. “I guess I’ll be seeing you tomorrow?”

Remus smiled softly, his voice managing to soothe the Animagus' heavy heart. "Of course. I have some work to finish tonight but you know I'll be there. And Sirius?"

The other man looked up.

“Just keep believing that everything will be alright. Harry is a strong person, he won’t abandon us. He’ll find a way to come back to us.”

Sirius smiled sadly, but a flicker of hope shone in his deep blue eyes. "You're right as always. Take care and see you tomorrow."

They parted ways and went back to their previous engagements.

WWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWW

Time sped by. A month became two.

# Hogwarts

“Sirius, could you wait for a moment?” Albus Dumbledore called out in the hallway. Sirius stopped short and looked up at the old man, one foot already outside his classroom door. A few students walked by and gazed at them curiously but quickly sped away, not daring to ask any questions.

“What is it, Albus? I don’t have much time; I want to go see Harry.”

The Headmaster motioned for Sirius to walk beside him. "That's exactly why I've come to talk to you. Maybe you should stay at Hogwarts today and get some rest. You can go see Harry tomorrow."

Sirius frantically shook his head. "No! I have to see him! I-"

Albus lifted a hand to stop Sirius from talking. "I know, my dear boy. But you have to understand; you look exhausted from going back and forth to St-Mungo's like this while trying to manage schoolwork. You even snapped at a few students in your classes yesterday. That's not like you at all. Harry won't disappear and he wouldn't want you to be so hard on yourself. And besides, Remus always visits him too for a little while, so you know Harry will have some company."

Sirius sighed tiredly, knowing there was no way he could win against the logical argument. It didn't mean he didn't feel guilty about it, though. "I really want to go but I know you're right. I really am tired from all this coming and going and I admit I've been hell to deal with these past few days. I guess...I'll take this day off and go to bed early."

Albus' eyes twinkled in happiness at the wise decision, even if Sirius sported a rather sad expression on his face.

"That's good." The old man accompanied the Animagus to his quarters and made certain Sirius was going to be alright. "Don't worry my boy, Remus will see to Harry today as he always does. I'm sure he'll understand your absence."

Sirius smiled half-heartedly and closed the portrait behind him, dumped a pile of uncorrected test sheets on his already overflowing work table and just let himself fall on the bed, going to sleep almost instantly.

The Ministry

"Mr. Lupin, wait!"



Remus sighed and rolled his eyes in annoyance. "What is it this time, Jonathan? The meeting is over and I have to go see Harry."

The young looking man, Jonathan, meekly shook his head and motioned in the meeting room's direction. "I apologize but it seems that Brom insulted one of your pack brothers again... I think they're about to kill each other in there."

Remus tsked and stomped his way back, unceremoniously dumping his coat in his stumbling helper's hand.

"That moron! What did he say this time? We were doing such great progress! If my pack mates don't skin him alive I think I will!"

Jonathan gasped when Remus' eyes became solid gold. "You don't really mean that, do you?" He paled when the Werewolf didn't answer.

When he saw lights zooming each and every way and heard snarling behind the closed door, Remus accelerated and literally banged it open. "ALL OF YOU SIT DOWN AND SHUT UP! he bellowed, making everyone freeze and sit down.

Milo Brom opened his mouth and closed it several times but no words came out after Remus shot him the look, the "say-one-more-thing-and-you'll-get-what's-coming-to-you" look. The Negotiator also quickly hid his wand under the table as if Remus didn't already see it. But the infuriating man had the gal to sneer in the Werewolves' faces as if he was not guilty of anything.

'Merlin I hate that man' our poor Werewolf thought sullenly, knowing he was stuck with Milo until the end of that damn Negotiation Pact.

The Werewolves under Remus' control looked down and bared their throat in a show of submission but still managed to send dirty looks towards the offending ministry official.

Remus breathed in and out and walked completely in the room, followed closely by his aide Jonathan, and he sat back down in his chair. "Now gentlemen, what seems to be the problem?"

And they all started to accuse each other again within a loud cacophony of insults. Remus slumped in his chair in defeat, a hand coming to his temples, trying to massage the impending headache out of his system. 'I guess Sirius will understand if I don't come for one day. He'll keep Harry company tonight like he always does and I'll see him tomorrow.'

Poor Remus.

Poor Sirius.

They didn't know it was what THEY were waiting for to finally strike.

The two humans weren't going to come today, they knew it; the visiting hours had already started and no one had shown up. By this time at least one of them was always already here, in the boy's room.

Finally, they could do as their Master ordered and take the boy without anyone knowing, giving them enough time to flee a safe distance between the Wizarding World and theirs.

They could only "kidnap" the boy during visiting hours, when everyone was invited to come in the hospital. The nurses wouldn't show up tonight to urge the two men to come back the next day; there wasn't anyone else in the room but Harry Potter.

The window silently opened and two beings crept in after checking the potentially dangerous wards around it. Luckily for them they deactivated during visiting hours or they would have been burned to a fine crisp.

They looked at all the magical items stuck to the comatose boy and sniffed in disdain before methodically shutting them off one by one and then getting all the needles out of the thin arms. "Such primitive methods," one scoffed lowly.

The other nodded but stayed silent, taking the young man into his arms carefully. "This is too easy. Let's go."

And both, along with a third companion this time, jumped out of the room and into the silent night with none the wiser.

Visiting hours ended.

In every room people were asked to leave.

Every room except one which didn't receive any visitors this time around.

Lights gradually closed in every corridor.

A light breeze from an open window, previously closed, was the only sign that something was wrong. The MediWizards wouldn't discover it until the next morning.

Sirius already felt better. He had woken up all energized and ready for a new day and now he was eating a huge breakfast before classes started. That is, until he received a letter by owl post while others received their newspapers. He spat his juice all over his part of the table with wide eyes and then got up so fast his chair fell down behind him. "WHAT!"

Everyone froze at the half-cry, half-scream and turned to their DADA teacher. Both his hands kept trembling as he finished reading the letter and the teachers started to get worried when his face went from disbelieving, to shocked, to angered and then made place to extreme fear and worry. Taking the letter in a daze he stumbled down the dais and was out the Great Hall before anyone could say a thing.

Then, as usual, everyone started to talk at the same time about their teacher's weird behaviour until a short wail froze them again. Hermione got up, shaking like a leaf. "P-professor Dumbledore!" She couldn't say anymore and started to cry silently. Ron immediately started to comfort her.

Minerva, from her place at the Head Table, frowned worriedly at one of her best student. "Miss Granger? Is there something wrong?"

Hermione merely shook the morning newspaper in her hand in front of them.

The Headmaster quickly unrolled his own paper and his face became ghostly white after reading just a few lines. "Classes are cancelled for today. Minerva, call the Order. I'm afraid that we might have to restrain Sirius from doing something he might regret later."

Said teacher watched the Headmaster walk down the aisle.

"I'm going ahead. Please join me as soon as possible."

"Wait Albus! Where are we going! What's going on!"

Dumbledore threw the Daily Prophet in front of her and promptly walked out. Her eyes widened when she saw this morning's front page. "Oh Merlin, no."

Right there in front of her, in big black bold letters, was the alarming title shouting out to the world: "HARRY POTTER MISSING FROM ST-MUNGO'S, KIDNAPPED DURING THE NIGHT?"

She didn't read the rest. Her eyes were rooted on the title. Only Xiomara's gasp and Sprout's muttering finally made her look up in resolution. "Everyone go back to your dormitories. You will listen to your Head of House's instruction. Bill you will replace Professor Snape with the Slytherins. Xiomara, you take my Gryffindors. I will keep in touch with you."

Ron almost stopped McGonagall to ask her if Hermione and he could come but he changed his mind when he saw the Transfiguration teacher's face when she whizzed past him.

"Poor Harry! What will happen to him? Where could he have been taken?" Hermione cried softly for her friend. Seeing the words "enemies", "remaining Death Eaters", "Dark supporters against what Harry Potter helped achieve" and all that nonsense of maybe the young man already being dead in the editorial...

Ron gazed at it in disdain and pointed his wand at it, setting it on fire with a good old Incendio spell. "Don't believe in that rubbish. I'm sure they'll find him. They HAVE to." But even his words wavered, traitors to his brave façade.

"HOW COULD THAT HAVE HAPPENED! WE WANTED HIM TO STAY AT HOGWARTS BUT YOU REFUSED US! WE LEFT HIM IN YOUR CARE! WE TRUSTED YOU! HOW COULD YOU NOT HAVE CHECKED ON HIM LAST NIGHT EVEN IF WE WEREN'T THERE!"

It would have been funny if it wasn't so tragic. Everybody would have thought Sirius Black would be the one to scream like that, two centimetres from a trembling MediWizard's face but no, Sirius Black was already on the floor, completely Petrified and Bound by one of Dumbledore's spells, spells he had to hold on to because the Animagus was fighting them even when he couldn't move.

On the other hand, the usually rational Remus was the one shouting, eyes completely golden and fangs bared dangerously, being barely held back by Shacklebolt and Mad-Eye Moody. But then he simply sagged and collapsed on the floor, hiding his tears in his hands. "Harry...Oh God, Harry....."

Seeing that he was going to have a nervous breakdown if they didn't do anything soon, a nurse made him drink a phial of Dreamless Sleep potion without the man really realizing it.

Albus sighed. "I suggest we search Harry's room to find some clues as to who could have taken him away...And if they were enemies or allies."

"Why do you think an ally would kidnap him!" A ministry official blurted out.

The old man glared. "Because there would have probably been blood all over the floor. The instruments keeping Harry stabilized were obviously removed with care. A Death Eater would have been hard pressed to be careful about the boy's state."

An Auror slowly examining the room snorted softly, thinking no one could hear him. "Or they wanted him in the best condition possible to inflict more damage..."

He never saw Sirius break free of Albus' hold, never saw the spell that hit him and certainly didn't hear the small battle that followed to subdue the screaming Godfather of their missing hero.

Elsewhere

"Ve vere successful, Milord. The boy has been retrieved." Two people bowed lowly in front of a third, who was currently sitting on a high chair decorated with thick animal fur.

"Good. Did you put him in the Guest Room?"

"As you ordered, Milord. But he is in terrible condition. The Vizards did not do a very good job of maintaining him alive."

The tall figure waved a hand dismissively and got up. A few shadows on each side of the wide room bent down further when the Master of the House glided by, a few whispering their disdain at having a human presence under their roof, especially a wizard...and a powerful one at that.

The Master snarled a silent threat at them, eyes glowing fiercely, and the shadows quickly made themselves sparse.

"Thank you Dmitriev, Sergeev. As always I knew I could count on you both. I vill look after the boy for a vwhile. I ask you to do one last thing for me; deal vith anyone who plots against the vizard. He is in MY House and I vill not tolerate disobedience. You are dismissed."

"Ve live to serve, Milord." Both replied at the same time and bowed one last time, as custom. But one of the two called out before the Master could walk out; "Aleksandr, you should write a letter to the two

men who were looking after the boy. The dog and the Verevolf. They, at least, deserve to know where their charge is."

The taller Vampire Lord nodded subtly without sparing them a glance. "You are right, old friend. I will heed your advice."

And then he vanished from their sight.

There wasn't any light in the guestroom but that didn't hinder him in the least; his eyes were almost glowing when they locked onto the comatose figure on the bed. He stalked slowly toward Harry Potter until he was right in front of the bed and fleetingly touched the boy's cheek and forehead, just a small caress.

"Even in your state your skin is warmer than mine. But Dmitriev and Sergeev were right: you would not have lasted long under their care. I sense something is missing in you. Perhaps it is that something that is preventing you from awakening. Or perhaps it is the wounds they could not treat in fear of damaging your body any more than it already is... No matter. I will accelerate your recovery and then I will see if you are truly worthy of becoming our ally. I do hope I did not make a bad decision when I let you go on the battlefield."

He opened a drawer in a nearby nightstand and picked up a sharp looking dagger. Anyone else would have thought that the Vampire was going to kill the boy but he redirected the sharp point to his own wrist and made a quick jerking movement. He hissed softly when his lifeblood started to seep out and placed said appendage above the boy's mouth, slowly massaging the throat to work with his other hand.

"The Council will be terribly mad at me for doing this but I do not really care at the moment. It will help coax a response from your body and your wounds will heal faster. I hope you will be worth all the trouble I will go through with the others."

He snatched his wrist back when he deemed enough blood had been ingested and licked the not so deep wound to prevent any blood spill. The slash disappeared slowly under his ministrations and he got up, sending one last look at the boy before closing the door behind him.

The huge manhunt that ensued was chaotic, to say the least. False leads were pouring in from everywhere. The Aurors were trying to get their hands on the remaining Death Eaters as fast as possible and the population, by trying to help, wasn't helping at all.

St-Mungo's Director was in trouble with both Sirius Black and the Ministry for gross negligence, as well as the nurses who were in charge of checking on their patients at all times.

School went on with Dumbledore leading the Order's search party in his spare time and he had to hire a substitute teacher to replace Sirius, who wanted to devote his entire time to finding his Godson. Remus had also demanded that the treaty with the Werewolves be put on hiatus for the time being, ensuring that no Werewolves would trouble the Wizards all the while.

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Time sped by.

Nobody ever heard news of the young man and Voldemort's remaining followers were clear: if they'd been the ones to capture Harry Potter they would have simply killed him. Note: after saying this, Sirius attacked them and they barely made it alive before being put into an Auror guarded Azkaban.

Winter was now well installed. Sirius and Remus both came back to Grimmauld Place with long faces again at another failure. Another day and still no news or clues as to the whereabouts of Harry. Opening the door while Remus watched for Muggles, they both gave their coats to a new House-Elf and went to the kitchen where they could hear voices.

It was an everyday occurrence since Sirius had donated his ancestor's house to the Order. But this time he was assaulted by Molly Weasley who brandished a letter in front of his face. Shackbolt followed silently, looking at the Weasley Matriarch with a



mild glare; apparently she had taken the letter from the Auror's grip without his authorization.

"Sirius! The Aurors found this letter in one of the Ministry's Muggle entrances! It's addressed to you and Remus and it has Harry's name on it!" As soon as she said that the Animagus almost jumped on the woman to get the letter. A couple more Order members came in the doorway and motioned for the two weary men to sit down in the kitchen.

Shacklebolt was still wearing his frown. "Careful, Black. It can very well be a trap."

"I'm desperate, Shacklebolt, but not moron enough to open this without first analyzing the envelope," Sirius grumbled.

Remus did it for him and after many revealing charms nothing wrong was found. The Animagus opened it carefully and started to read. Molly, who was looking over his shoulder, frowned in disappointment. "It's all blurred."

Remus, who was standing beside her and also looking at the piece of parchment, blinked at her. "I can read it perfectly fine."

Moody snorted loudly, making them jump a little. "Apparently, whoever wrote that letter only intended for Black and Lupin to read it. Can you tell us what it says?"

Sirius finished reading but when he tried to tell him where Harry was nothing came out of his mouth. Shacklebolt shook his head. "It's as you thought, Moody. Whoever wrote that is not an amateur. It looks like a part of the Fidelius process was used on the letter. But can you tell us if it mentions your Godson?"

Sirius opened his mouth. "Yes. It says he's still unconscious but that a special treatment is currently used on him to speed up Harry's recovery, at least the magical injuries. I don't have any more details on Harry's condition and while even the area in which he is currently being held is under Fidelius, it is too vague of a description to go look

for him if I wanted to.” The Animagus looked particularly peeved at this.

“Is it signed?” Percy Weasley asked from his place at the table, beating Moody to the next question.

Remus answered, frowning. “It says that we already encountered the one who is trying to cure Harry, although briefly and in the context it wasn’t a pleasurable walk in the park. There are no names in the letter except Harry’s, though the one who wrote this left his initials: A.M.”

Everyone looked at each other, pondering on those two letters. A few names came out but were dismissed almost as fast. “It could be a false lead,” Moody inserted, but Remus shook his head. “There’s a trace of Harry’s smell on the letter so the person must have been near Harry when they were writing it. But the other one I simply cannot identify. I’m sorry. What do you think, Sirius?”

The Marauder shook his head. “I really don’t know to whom those initials belong to. We can always ask Dumbledore to check the letter for further clues, if possible. If not, I fear our only option will be to wait it out.”

The room became silent, its occupants deep in thought.

He was in trouble, he concluded knowingly, when he received a summoning letter from the Honourable Council Leader just a few weeks after having taken the boy in. One of his big mouthed lesser servants had no doubt babbled a little too much for their own good. He glared at the yellowed piece of paper.

Two shadows bowed behind him.

“Dmitriev, Sergeev, someone here loves to gossip. Find them while I am away, von’t you?”

“Of course.” Both smirked and got up. “Are you certain you want to go alone, Aleksandr? One of us can go with you.”

The Master of the House shook his head slowly. “You will not be of any use to me there. Just find that blabbermouth and make sure he knows well enough to keep his mouth shut in the future.” The command to keep Harry Potter safe in his absence wasn’t voiced but omnipresent in the older man’s eyes.

His two friends nodded and blended in the shadows until the Master couldn’t feel their presence anymore.

Aleksandr sighed. “As the Muggles say: time to face the music.” Using a special device similar to a Portkey he muttered a Russian incantation and disappeared in grey smoke.

Time sped by. A year, to be exact. To keep Sirius and Remus from having a nervous breakdown the Vampire Master had sent more letters to them. Harry’s condition was stable, even though he had yet to wake up. His wounds were apparently all gone, or so the letter said, so both Marauders had to keep hoping the author of these letters wasn’t making it all up.

Orion, Vega and Mathias had come out of the Forbidden Forest a couple of times to gather some news of Harry but never stayed long when Sirius told them he was still unconscious, wherever he was. Remus had started to work on the treaty again and had completed it a few months ago. The relation between the Ministry and the Werewolves was still tentative but it was better than before.

Sirius had gone back to teaching, as well as Severus, but now the Animagus never really talked much outside of class. Students could find him thinking, in his own world, in the middle of a corridor sometimes; they found it funny the first few times but they knew he was only thinking of his Godson’s health and whereabouts.

No one had seen or heard of Nagini, Salazar or Hedwig since Harry’s disappearance. Some fancied that they were with Harry, others

thought the familiars were hiding in the Forbidden Forest or even in the Chamber of Secrets. Either way life went on.

WWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWW

“Vere is he?”

Sergeev turned around and bowed to his Master's guests; Sokolov, Solovei and Vetrov. All three were Council members and Master of their own respective clans.

It was decided one year ago, after much tedious arguing, that the human could stay under Aleksandr's protection, under his sole responsibility. If something happened, it would be blamed on the Mikhailov Clan's Leader and harsh actions would be taken. To make sure everything was in order, three Council Members would come to Mikhailov Coven once a week to ascertain the situation.

Sergeev liked two out of the three who came this day.

Sokolov was like an old falcon; fierce, wise and protective. The blond haired Solovei, one of the few women on the Council, represented her name as always; her voice was always calming with its sweet Nightingale timbre. Vetrov, though, was still young and always impulsive, coming and going like the wind. His moody personality gave him a bad reputation and he was one of the few who really did not want Harry to survive, as he was a Wizard, a mere mortal.

“He is in the young man’s room, as always. Please follow me, I will guide you to him.” Sergeev tried to ignore Vetrov’s low muttering behind him. As he was about to turn around and say something probably very foolish to the bearded Master, Solovei shushed him herself with a look.

“Ve are not here to slander Aleksandr’s name in his own home, Vetrov. Aleksandr can stay in the boy’s room all he vants; these times are peaceful and he can afford it.”

The tactful reply made Sergeev smile; Vetrov always looked like a scolded child when she interfered with her dulcet voice.

Suddenly, the floor began to shake. As they were about to grab hold of something to stay upright it ended, just as quick as it began. The shadows began to whisper harshly and Sergeev snarled at the lesser Vampires to keep silent.

Footsteps resounded in the empty hallways and Sergeev quickly noticed Dmitriev running towards them. "What is going on? What was that rumbling!"

Dmitriev stopped in front of them and turned around just as fast, motioning at them to follow him. Sergeev wasn't worried anymore, though, because Dmitriev almost looked hopeful. "The tremor came from Harry Potter's chambers! The Master thinks he will wake up soon! Come!"

When they arrived, Aleksandr was standing in the doorway. They could see why: there was a vivid light coming from inside and they all had to shield their sensitive eyes in order to take a peek in the bedroom.

"What is going on! He will destroy us all! We should kill the boy before he wakes up!"

Aleksandr hissed and spared Vetrov a brief warning glance. When the bright light finally started to subside, they were all surprised to see a Phoenix lying on the boy's chest.

"The missing piece..." Aleksandr muttered to himself, making the others glance at him questioningly. "It was why he wouldn't wake up. This Phoenix is the representation of the boy's power and soul. Once his strength came back it would also come back."

He then turned toward the creature. "Am I right?"

The fiery bird thrilled once in response and slowly burst in flames that swirled around before hitting the Wizard's cheek and down under the

boy's night wear, burning something along its path. When it was finally over, the six Vampires entered the bedroom cautiously, the Council members more so than the Mikhailov Coven residents.

Aleksandr's eyes light up in recognition when he glimpsed at the cooling Phoenix tattoo on his protégé's cheek and neck and the magic wand lying where the Phoenix used to. On the young man's forehead, a lightning bolt shaped scar was glowing softly and mending under Aleksandr's watchful stare. He delicately lowered the boy's collar and saw the tattoo continuing downward.

A sigh.

He pulled his hands away so fast they looked blurry for an instant.

Green eyes opened a tad, just like little slits, and his mouth moved slowly before the Wizard sluggishly fell asleep again.

Silence reigned in the room, then: "It looks like I will have to tell the cooks to prepare something light for the boy to eat."

Aleksandr blinked and looked at Sergeev. "Yes. Yes, something to eat. No blood."

He looked so delighted that the other Vampires did not deign roll their eyes at him.

Vetrov broke the moment when he walked out of the bedroom without a word, no doubt going back to the Council to announce the news of the boy's awakening. Solovei and Sokolov bid the mystified Vampire a good day, promising that they would keep in touch and left more quietly than their third companion.

Dmitriev put a hand on his Lord's shoulder and the older male quickly snapped back to reality. "Yes, yes. There is a lot to do! Things will finally move faster now that he has woken up. Let's see if I did a good deed by letting him live." He hurried out of the room like a man with a new purpose in life and disappeared in the shadows.

Both his guards shared an amused look. "It looks like the boy will have a lot waiting ahead of him. Rare are the times when Aleksandr actually holds a genuine interest in someone other than another Vampire... The boy will either be great, or be killed."

They walked out of the room and the door closed quietly behind them.

When Harry woke up again, it was to the sweet smell of warm soup. His stomach gurgled and he groaned, sitting upright with some difficulty. He heard laughter and stiffened, searching for his wand, but could not find it. It was then that two people came out of the shadows of his room.

But he wasn't in Hogwarts.

His eyes narrowed dangerously. "Who are you? Where am I?"

His magical aura stirred around him and both men lifted their hands in a surrendering gesture. "Ah, our guest is awake. Do not worry, Harry Potter, if we had wanted you dead we would have killed you already in your sleep."

The other man nodded. "You are in Mikhailov Coven, where exactly I will not tell you. I am Sergeev, but you may call me Sergei, it is easier to pronounce. And here is my friend Dmitriev."

The one called Dmitriev smiled toothily, and Harry immediately noticed the pointed canines. "You may call me Dmitri. We will be taking care of you while you recuperate, though I doubt it will take long since our master made you drink some of his blood."

"What!" Harry gave them a shaken look.

"Oh, don't worry! You probably know what we are by now but know that we did not bite you. Master simply gave you drops of his blood so you would recuperate faster. Part of your soul was gone when we "found" you, you see. You just had to get your strength back before the Phoenix came back to you."

Harry stroked his cheek absentmindedly. He vaguely remembered hearing a Phoenix's song and getting a warm feeling in his heart, as well as seeing a blurry figure when he first woke up, but that was it. "Your master, was he here when I woke up?"

Sergei nodded. "So you remember. It was Master Aleksandr, but you saw him before."

At Harry's inquisitive look, he continued, "On the battlefield. He was the one you fought briefly."

Harry blinked in recognition. "Ah, the Vampire who spared me."

"Indeed."

Harry jumped and his hand moved on its own accord, releasing a quick cutting curse without thinking. Luckily the newcomer had fast reflexes and the wall now sported an indentation.

"Or was it you who spared me?" A well shaped eyebrow quirked up when Harry gave Aleksandr a sheepish look.

"Sorry about that. Please don't surprise me again. I don't react well to that."

"Yes, I saw that. I apologize. I forgot how wizards become apprehensive in an environment not their own."

Harry shrugged. "You can't blame me. I woke up Merlin knows where surrounded by strangers. Sorry, but I'm not exactly popular with some crowds. You could have been Death Eaters, for all I know."

The one known as Sergeev, or Sergei, snorted. "The deceased Lord's followers? Impossible. They were nearly all captured and/or killed a year ago."

Harry couldn't help it, he gaped. "A year? Are you fuckin' kidding me!" He then rasped his throat and his green eyes narrowed. "I think there's a lot you need to tell me."



Aleksandr nodded and sat down in a nearby chair, waving his guards away. They bowed, shared a look with the human on the bed and slid back into darkness. "First I think you'll be delighted to know that your Godfather and his Verevolf friend are alive and well." He kept on when he saw Harry visibly letting a shaky breath out and relax on the bed. "The vizarding world was still reorganizing when I ordered your kidnapping..."

And Harry listened, his eyes fixed on the Vampire's golden ones.

"...Wow, I didn't think so much had happened since that day. And I was really given the Order of Merlin First Class?" Harry asked curiously after hearing Aleksandr's story. He had finished the soup a while ago and now both Aleksandr's guards were back.

The Master nodded, smirking. "Yes. You must be the first one to have actually received the award while in a coma. Congratulations."

Harry sighed and muttered under his breath while Sergeev and Dmitriev approached their friend to whisper something in his ear. The only human present in the Coven watched as Aleksandr's lips tightened and he got up gracefully. He then turned towards Harry without so much a trace of worry and offered the boy a helping hand, which he took.

The Vampire Master led Harry out of the room but calmed the boy's suspicions by saying he had to meet with the Council in order for them to see he was not a threat. Harry accepted, he had no choice in the matter anyway, but if things got out of hand he at least still had his wand with him. A shame Nagini wasn't, though. Or Salazar.

Hm, now he felt nostalgic. He just realized he greatly missed their presence, as well as Hedwig's. And as soon as this task was finished he was going to write to Sirius and Remus. Merlin, the poor men were probably worried sick about him. He thought back and now his hands were itching to sign those adoption papers. The thought of going back to a safe Hogwarts made him internally giddy and he mentally scolded himself to calm down as the Vampires beside him could sense his shift in behaviour.

Sergei did eye him briefly but no one said a word as they arrived in a large room, more like a study. Harry couldn't help but look around him at all the foreign objects and admire the black marble walls. "Find anything interesting?"

Harry startled and Aleksandr had the gall to find it amusing. “Well, it’s a very...impressive room. It’s beautiful.”

“Wait until you see the rest of the Coven, then. But for now hold my hand and don’t let go; we will be going to another Coven by a means similar to your Portkeys. I assure you the trip is not as turbulent, though.” He quickly added when the green eyed young man watched the item in his hands with distaste and a lot of mistrust. ‘Hm, a bad experience with Portkeys, I see.’

But the human still put his hands tentatively on the Vampire's and the object in question. And they were off.

**WWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWW**

He was going to have to reign in his temper if he wanted to make a good impression, Harry concluded. Most of the Vampire guards here were looking at him with distrust so Aleksandr had to walk pretty close to him just in case one of them decided to have a drink.

A large set of doors was opened in front of them and they quietly walked in, Harry taking in any means of escape possible and looking at all the Vampires present. "Are all of them Lords?" The green eyed boy murmured softly to his companion.

“You have a good eye. Yes, they are all from different Covens all over the world. I sense you are nervous with this.”

Harry and Aleksandr were asked to stand in the middle of the huge gothic-like room.

“Who wouldn’t be? After all, I did kill a few back in Diagon Alley last year.”

The Mikhailov Lord chuckled so softly Harry almost didn't hear. "They will not hold it against you. The five Lords that were killed wanted to follow Voldemort like puppies. True Vampires remain free of any master who would want to enslave them. They were weak and were going to be eliminated anyway, by your hands or by ours."

Harry nodded and turned his attention to the now silent Council in front of him. He surmised that the row in front of him was comprised of all the most influential Vampires so he mostly kept his attention there. Behind them was a dark corner where he could sense someone was hiding. Or maybe just sitting? A black almost see-through cloth was hiding the person from being seen.

"So this is him. Harry Potter, Zarubin. The one who set in motion last year's war."

Harry looked in front of him again when one of the Councilmen broke the silence. Aleksandr nodded, his face as serious as theirs.

"He shouldn't be here! We should kill him now before he turns against us!"

Both men standing in the middle eyed Vetrov who had spoken, situated to their right amongst the ordinary council members. Harry recognized him from earlier when he had first woken up; the one with obvious distaste for humans.

Aleksandr tensed beside him when Vetrov's shout stirred others into following his opinion.

"SILENCE."

The voice gave Harry shivers and he gazed back in front of him, choosing to ignore the other voices around him. "Tell me, Zarubin, what are your intentions now?"

Harry blinked and he mouthed 'Zarubin?' inquisitively to Aleksandr, who motioned towards his forehead. 'Your scar.' He mouthed back.

The black haired boy nodded. "Well, I'd like to live in peace for once. And maybe learn more about Vampires. Couldn't we create an Alliance? Lord Mikhailov told me that the Werewolves had finally signed a treaty with our Ministry."

'Wrong thing to say,' Harry thought with a wince when nearly all of the Vampires started to shout at once, their eyes becoming redder by the second. Once again a hand motion from the old Vampire made them stop, but this time even the oldest members looked insulted. Not a good prospect.

"Impossible. We do not trust your ministry enough to propose such a thing."

"Ack, ja! Ve vill not be put down as inferior beings!"

"Il a raison. Nous serions traités comme des chiens et suivis par le Ministère, obligés d'obéir à des règlements impossible à suivre pour assurer notre survie!"

Harry had heard enough when nearly all of them voiced their opinion against the possible idea of a treaty. But he did understand this: they also wanted to live in peace.

"Then do it with me!" He cried out, making one of them stop in mid-sentence. "If you don't trust the Ministry enough, trust me! Lord Mikhailov does!...I think... I hardly ever use my popularity, but I know I hold enough power in the Wizarding World as the defeater of Voldemort to actually make the Wizards trust in my opinion. If anything goes wrong I can be the mediator. Remus created a treaty with the Werewolves, which was thought impossible, and I created a treaty with the Centaurs. But the Centaurs don't answer to the Ministry! They're not my slaves either, they're my friends! We're simply there for each other if a problem arises and we need support. Why couldn't we do the same?"

Silence greeted his statement.

Then Aleksandr laughed and slapped his back, making Harry huff a little. "I knew I liked him! I can vouch for him if you'd like me to." Aleksandr wasn't looking at the Council members anymore, but at the person hidden in the shadows behind the ten oldest Vampires.

Harry heard a raspy voice replying in a language he didn't recognize but Aleksandr must have since he nodded. The Councilmen looked a bit put out of place at what was said since a good number of them fidgeted in their seats. Sokolov, whom Harry also recognized, gazed at him with piercing eyes. "Then how could we seal this deal and know you will not turn against us?"

Harry looked around him. "So I would just need a trusted Vampire partner to create a viable treaty for us all?"

The Councilmen nodded. "Then I already have one, if you approve of him." He put a hand on a baffled Aleksandr's shoulder.

Once again the Vampire hiding in the shadows spoke up, making the leading Council member nod. "Lord Mikhailov will do. But how do you intend to seal this deal?"

Harry thought it carefully and an official piece of parchment appeared in his hands. "There. All the conditions mentioned are written and we only have to sign this; I'll send it to the Ministry so it will become official that you have created an Alliance, not with them but with me."

Aleksandr read it over and nodded in satisfaction. "This is safe, no hidden clause." He pricked his index finger on one of his sharp fangs and signed his name in blood.

Harry levitated the parchment towards the shadowed Vampire so he or she could also read it and approve. The parchment came back with an additional signature in blood, which surprised the Mikhailov Lord, as well as all the other Vampires present.

'This person must really be important if it surprises even Vampire Lords...I wonder who it is...' Harry silently wondered while signing his own name on the paper; the signature next to Aleksandr's wasn't

written in a readable dialect, at least not one he knew of. He then rolled the parchment and it disappeared after an incantation.

“And then to seal the deal between Lord Mikhailov and I...”

They all looked on curiously at what he was going to do. Harry's eyes lit up when he spotted what he was searching for and he walked to a table set not too far from him. Harry transfigured a quill into a transparent wine glass and brought it to his treaty partner, who took it with a raised eyebrow.

Harry smiled up at him. “I can think of no other means to link us together in a more official Vampire way.” He explained while bringing his wand out. Vampires all around him tensed, preparing to attack. But he only murmured “Scindo” while pointing towards his wrist.

Aleksandr gasped when Harry pressed his newly made wound against the wine glass and couldn't help but take a strong whiff of the fresh smell of blood that assaulted his senses.

“You made me drink some of your blood to make me heal faster so I can't think of a better way to show you my trust and gratitude.” He took his wrist back and murmured a minor healing charm when the glass was finally filled enough.

“That, and I couldn't help but notice you really wanted to drink my blood on the battlefield,” the young man added jokingly.

Aleksandr chuckled with a look of pleasure still etched on his face. “Vell that was unexpected, but I really appreciate this proof of your faith in me.”

The Vampires around them nodded, still surprised at such a show of trust between a human wizard and a vampire.

When the blood finally touched his tongue and flowed down his throat Aleksandr barely refrained from moaning in delight. “Yes, I think we will be getting along just fine.”

Harry smiled.

Sirius fidgeted again in his seat, sloshing a little bit of Butterbeer on the wooden table. Remus looked up from his reading, quirked a smile at his friend and looked down again. He appeared calm, as always, but he was a nervous wreck. He was clutching at Harry's letters so tightly that he heard a rip and Sirius sent him a look. The Werewolf sighed and decided it would be better to let go of the parchments before he tore them apart; Sirius would not appreciate it.

He couldn't wait to finally see Harry again. It felt to him as if he hadn't seen Harry in years; the first letter he had sent them had been a blessing and when they had received news from the Ministry that a new contract had been signed between the Potter heir and the Vampires it had further proven the fact that he was indeed alive and the letters Sirius and he had received weren't forged.

Dumbledore had been able to get a look, at their request, at the document in question. It was a true binding magical contract and it had been signed by three people: Harry James Potter himself, Aleksandr Mikhailov of the Mikhailov Coven and an unknown Vampire, possibly an Elder or THE Elder, if the obscure dialect was anything to go by.

At least now they knew that the one who had sent them letters about Harry's condition was the Mikhailov Coven's Lord himself, which fit the initials A.M. to the bill.

The Ministry hadn't been happy that Harry had signed a contract without them, at first. The Daily Oracle had had a blast with this one, claiming that Harry was beginning to replace Lord Voldemort by gathering new Dark Forces. The rumours had quickly been denied and the offending articles corrected after the population started to support Harry in his decisions. Sirius hadn't even had to do anything this time to defend his Godson's honour. Remus smirked at that thought. 'Oh, he'd been so pissed...'

The door opened slowly, the song of bells faintly echoing in the background noise. Nobody really noticed the new arrival at first, until

a snowy owl flew swiftly inside right as the door was closing. Rosmerta swatted at the bird and stalked to the stranger with a frown on her face. "I'm sorry sir but animals aren't permitted ins-" She stopped in mid-phrase and stared as the newcomer lowered his hood and looked at her with a raised eyebrow and a playful smirk etched on his lips.

She was about to scream in joy when he motioned at her to stay silent. She slapped a hand on her mouth to stop any incoming sound and nodded quickly, almost jogging to him to take his cloak off of his shoulders. "We'll talk later?" He said with a soft smile. She returned it and shot a quick glance towards the remaining Marauders before going back to work, grinning like no tomorrow.

Eyes widened and followed his movements as he walked towards the back of the pub, but nobody dared to get up to talk to him, respecting his silent wishes. Add he fact that a snake was silently hissing on his shoulders and it deterred the rest.

Green eyes sparkled when he noticed both men hadn't even seen him yet. "My, my, I'm feeling quite left out. You didn't even order me a Butterbeer. Did you really miss me as much as you wrote in your letters?"

He laughed out loud when Remus got up so fast the papers he held in his hands, his letters, he noticed, flew everywhere and scattered on the floor. Sirius was already in front of him, trying to strangle him in a suffocating hug.

"HARRY!"

The Werewolf swatted at Sirius and shoved him aside so he could also hug the young man.

" Yes, I'm back." He then laughed when he heard Nagini's disgruntled hissing fit. "Sorry I'm a little late. I had to stop in the Forbidden Forest to get Hedwig and Nagini and I fell upon Salazar as well. Then a Centaur found me and you know...I just had to say hello



to Orion and the rest of the clan. I couldn't stay too long so I promised them to come back another time."

Remus blinked back a few tears of happiness and took a step back, eyeing him carefully. "You look totally healed. And aren't you a little taller? What are those clothes you're wearing?"

Sirius motioned for them to sit down and asked for another Butterbeer for Harry.

"Well, it's a long story." Harry's cheeks reddened slightly. "But yeah, I am a little taller. And I didn't have enough time to change into normal Wizard clothes. Besides, I rather like these. Aleksandr had them made for me."

Sirius patted the soft black Vampire-styled clothing in admiration. "Isn't that Acromantula silk?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah. I rather like it. I didn't ask him for such expensive clothes but the order had already been made. So I accepted the gift graciously."

"Wow, you'll have to tell me everything about it."

"Only if you tell me in detail everything that's happened while I was gone," the youngest of the three replied.

"But first!" Remus interrupted, making them both look at him inquisitively, "you'll have to sign this. I think we all waited long enough."

Sirius jumped slightly in his chair when Remus pulled a rolled piece of parchment out of his pocket and the Animagus grinned and nodded excitedly. "Yes, that's priority number one."

Harry looked at them both as if they were crazy before unrolling the parchment. His eyes softened and he smiled a true smile when he read and recognised the first few lines written on the paper. He didn't

even read the rest before he conjured a quill and promptly signed his name beside the two other signatures.

The parchment swiftly disappeared and the three sat back in their chairs, feeling the magic at work. "Welcome to the family, little Prongs." Sirius grinned and both he and Remus put a hand on Harry's. "Yes, welcome to the family, Harry."

Harry closed his hands around both of theirs and closed his eyes, letting a few stray tears leak.

"It's good to be home."

Oh. My. GOD. Is this the end! I think it is! ( lol ) I leave to your imagination everything that's happened while Harry was at the Coven and everything that will happen afterwards. If you think that Aleksandr made passes at Harry and it pleases you, well good! If you don't like it, just think that Vampires are sexual creatures and that it was just in his nature to act like that. Everybody will be happy this way. And no way in Hell am I making an Epilogue about "19 years later"...You get my drift?

Now that it's finally over, I will try to correct a few mistakes in the story and post the chapters back up all revamped. I kept all the reviews telling me where to find errors (grammatical and or story-wise) so it'll go faster. Thanks for those, guys! They'll greatly help me. Maybe I'll get a beta to read it over afterwards, I'll see.

Now you have a decision to make. You can either answer in a review or in the poll I set-up in my bio-profile.

I MAY write some sort of INDEPENDENT sequel (only ONE chapter) that can be tied or not to the main story. It would concern Harry and Aleksandr so this would be for slash lovers only. I don't want to hear complaints or see flames from slash haters. You would be in no obligation to read this chapter; I could create it as a new story so you wouldn't have to read it directly from this one. I will follow the poll results. I am doing this because I received quite a few requests for a Harry/Aleksandr story and since I don't want to lose readers from this

fic I am willing to separate it so you can still read this one and see Harry without a slash shipping.

This is it, people, make your choice. Remember that flames have never been, and still aren't, tolerated. You don't like the story, you just don't read it! Why take the time to read and flame if you just don't like it? Close the window and change story, that's all.

I want to thank EVERYONE who reviewed the story and encouraged me the whole time! You guys are the greatest in the whole world! (sniffles)

See you (maybe) in the independent sequel!

Your devoted slave and fic-writer,

Eternal Cosmos

